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The saint® MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

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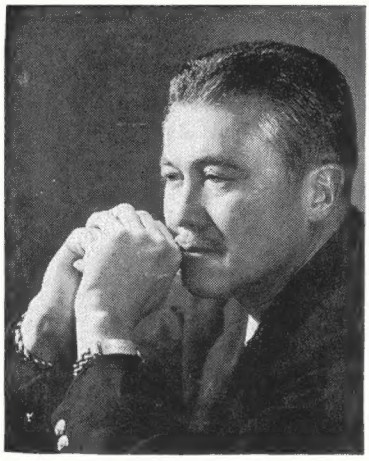
SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



One of the most moot of literary questions is the part that sex should play in mystery stories.

It is well known to regular readers of this Magazine, and has been proclaimed more than once in this space, that I have no use for a certain "school" (if one can use a word even vaguely related to education) of mystery writings, whose practitioners will not get any free publicity by being named here, in which the female characters are differentiated mainly by their chest measurements, but practically uniform in their impatience to get undressed and/or into bed.

On the other hand, since by an accident of birth the detective story originated and had its first flowering in an age of prudery, the treatment of sex in its classical examples is equally unrealistic. At the opposite end of the scale from the alcoholic private eye and his hypertrophied pushovers, the classical detective is as ascetically dedicated to his craft as an abstract mathematician, the conquering hero has a heart so inarticulately pure that his strength should be as the strength of at least a hundred and ten, and all the girls are as ideally impregnable as mermaids or else just jolly good chums. The fate worse than death is never adumbrated clearly enough to make the most sensitive spinster's imagination cringe except formally and perfunctorily; Edgar Wallace dared to speak of White Slavery, but never actually let a horrified heroine get a shoulder-strap broken on stage. Richard Hannay, Bulldog Drummond, Raffles, and all such splendid good sports and gentlemen, would have condemned any man who understood women as an obvious cad of the lowest order. "Jealousy" is a popular motive for murder, but the torments that might drive a man or woman to homicide are barely hinted at. A Wicked Woman is defined by leering between mascara'd lashes and an overlength cigarette holder, with no other clue to what she had on the ball that Drove Men Mad. As for the sterilized sleuths themselves, they were all so aloof from normal procreative urges that serious scholars have actually claimed to prove, from internal evidence, that the reason why Dr. Watson's brushed-off marriage got nowhere, and Mr. Holmes's extremely misty romance with the Adler woman left him intact, was that the two of them were really a pair of happy queers that even the most fatal *femme* could not put asunder.

Heaven forbid that I should get editorially embroiled in such an argument. But I do want to clarify a point for the relief of some of our possibly over-anxious contributors, as well as for some readers who may have wondered, while respecting our good taste, whether we are trying to push Sex back into its Victorian limbo.

I think there is a sound basis for the popular assumption that it is here to stay. I should welcome a little more of it in this Magazine—if we can only find it handled with the healthy good taste and artistry which such a fine old subject deserves. Not booze and bazooms, but a cheerful recognition of the facts of life.

Ellery Queen

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V: How Simon Templar walked in the Sun, and Drank from various Bottles.

THE SAINT'S JACKET was gone, and his trouser pockets had been emptied of everything except a handful of small change which had been almost contemptuously left. He took out a five-lire piece and dropped it out of the window from arm's length. It vanished into the gloom below, but for as long as he strained his ears he could not hear it strike bottom. Whatever was below the window had to be a long way down.

But the door offered no alternative. It was massively constructed of thick planks bolted together and belted with iron straps; and while the lock would probably have been easy to pick if he had had any sort of tool, there was simply nothing on him or in the bare room that he could use. The window might seem like a kind of Russian roulette with five chambers loaded, but it was the only possible way out. And to remain there was certain death.

Without wasting another instant of precious time, Simon tore the blanket from the cot and began to rip it into usable strips. Knotted together, along with the

vendetta for the saint

by Leslie Charteris

THE SAINT DISCOVERS THINGS ABOUT SICILY WHICH HE HAD NOT KNOWN BEFORE AND MEETS A NAUGHTY GIRL

cord with which he had been tied, they gave him a rope about thirty feet long and of highly speculative strength. He had often read about this standard device, like everyone else, but had had just as few occasions as anyone to try it out in practise. There was no way to test it in advance, other than by strenuous tugging, which appeared to reveal no intrinsic weakness. Less than ten minutes after he had been locked in, he had one end of the rope secured to the frame of the bed, and the bed itself propped up across the window, allowing the greatest possible length of his improvised hawser to hang down the wall.

He sat on the sill, his legs dangling over the void, and studied as much as he could of the situation. Though the details of the gorge below were still concealed by the morning mist, the sky was now rapidly lightening—enough to disclose a broadening range of topographical features.

The cliff on which the house was perched formed part of one side of a narrow valley through which straggled a small village with a fair-sized church spire reaching above the white

WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

For a few rare moments Simon Templar had been looking forward solely to the *Arragosta alla Vesuvio* being readied in the depths of the Naples restaurant where he was waiting—and then Alessandro "Gopher" Destamio was to intrude into the Saint's life and to, in the weeks to come, make repeated efforts to eliminate him the way those annoying to the Mafia were normally coped with.

As Simon, ever ready to do battle with the ungodly, begins to probe into the strange background of this man who he is convinced had had an English tourist murdered (the problem is *why*. . . .) he calls on the great man at his villa on Capri, narrowly escapes assassination and then arrest because he has not allowed himself to be killed, and meets the incredible Gina Destamio, the niece of his good friend.

Here is added incentive for Simon Templar's researches into the folkways of these *mafiosi*. Having discovered a Bugatti, a type 41 Royale, he sallies forth in this rare example of the genius of Ettore Bugatti only to find that the friends of Alessandro Destamio have no interest in Italy's cultural treasures. They are quite prepared to wreck the Bugatti if this means Simon can also be eliminated.

In Simon's subsequent interview with the dying leader of the Mafia it becomes clear that, in the eyes of these gentlemen the time has obviously come to settle with the Saint once and for all. He has been a thorn in the side of the organization for too long a time. . . . His end may be somewhat unpleasant, if Alessandro Destamio—whose prisoner he is—has his way. The house in which he is being held is perched on the very edge of a precipice. The window from which he leans out looks out into a void. Below him is the smooth wall merging without a break into the vertical cliff which serves as its foundation. And somewheres down below this is unfathomable blackness . . .

Now read on. . . .

houses. Beyond the town the hills rose again abruptly, and even higher peaks probed skyward in the distance. To the left, through the clearing haze, he could just make out a thin ribbon of road winding upwards along the opposite slope; to the right, it seemed to descend from the village. Holding on with one hand and leaning as far out as he could, he was rewarded with a glint of sunlight reflected on water, far off in the latter direction. The road to the right, then, led down towards the sea, and that would be the direction of escape. He hadn't the vaguest idea where on the map he was, but he knew that the interior of Sicily consisted almost entirely of mountain ranges, and that the main roads followed the coast line of that triangular island to connect the larger cities, all of which are on the sea.

From beyond the door behind him he heard footsteps again, and the metallic rattle of the key in the lock. If he was going to fly the coop at all, this was the positively last chance for take-off.

With a sinuous motion he twisted off the ledge until he hung supported only by his fingers. Then he shifted one hand to the blanket-rope and gradually transferred his weight, experimentally, until all of it was on the rope. The ancient fabric stretched but held; and thereafter his most urgent concern was to make the strain on it as brief as possible. He lowered himself hand under hand with a speed that came close to that of a circus acrobat, tempered only by the requirement of avoiding any abrupt jerks or jolts that might tax his makeshift lifeline beyond its dubious breaking-point.

He was halfway down when a gaping face appeared from the window above him, and two yards lower before it could express its perplexity in words.

"Che cosa faccia?"

Believing that anyone who asked what he was doing, in those circumstances, could not be seriously expecting an answer, Simon ignored the intrusion and concentrated even more intensely on his gymnastic performance. Therefore he was looking downwards when the man produced a gun, and the first indication he had of its presence was the crack of the shot and the dying scream of a bullet ricocheting from the wall near his head. It took an ice-nerved self-discipline to make no change in the smoothness of his descent —or perhaps he was more worried about the capacity of his rope than about the markmanship of the man upstairs.

From above, next, he heard the voice of Al Destamio engaged in noisy altercation with the gunman. It seemed that Al

didn't want him to shoot any more, for reasons which the Saint could appreciate, but which were meeting a good deal of consumer resistance from the minor *mafioso*, who had discovered a delightfully novel form of target practise and resented being deprived of it. While they wrangled, Simon descended a few more feet, and literally came to the end of his rope.

Holding on with one vise-clamped fist, he saw that his feet were still almost a metre above the bottom of the wall, which was based less than half that distance from the cliff edge. Below that lip, the rock face dropped away at a slant of about eighty degrees to an orchard that looked almost far enough to open a parachute, which he wished he had. Especially as the argument at the window overhead seemed to be compromised with a violent shaking or hauling on the flimsy filament from which he was suspended.

He had no choice but to take one more gamble.

He opened his hand and dropped. . . .

He landed lightly on his toes, knees bending to cushion the steadiest possible landing. Dirt crumbled and gravel trickled down the escarpment, but the rock foundation was solid. He rested there a moment, plastered against the gripless wall of the building and envying octopods with suction cups in their tentacles.

The nearest corner of the house was at least twenty feet to his right, and he began to edge cautiously in that direction. There was a sudden silence from the window above, and it did not take much imagination to visualize Destamio and others trundling around to meet him. But there was a good chance that he could reach the side of the building before they could make their way to the same area by a more normal route through the house. Once he was off that vertiginous ledge, he would have to extemporize his next step according to what openings presented themselves. His planning had gone no farther than this, where he considered himself comparatively fortunate to be.

Which was all to the good, since he was destined never to reach the corner of the building. Another of the Mafia security corps had apparently been already outside, and upon hearing the shots had moved to investigate this unwonted matutinal activity. His head appeared like a jack-in-the-box around the angle towards which Simon was inching his precarious way.

"*Buon giorno,*" said the Saint, with his maximum affability. "Is this the way to the bathroom?"

The reaction was fully as obvious and exaggerated as a cinematic double-take. The new-

comer's sagging jaw dragged his mouth open in a befuddled O, exposing an interesting assortment of gold teeth interspersed with the blackened stumps of their less privileged fellows which had yet to benefit from auric reconstitution.

"*Che cosa fa?*"

The question seemed no less inanely rhetorical to the Saint than it had on the previous occasion, but this time he made an attempt to keep the conversation going.

"*Ebbene*, it is like this," he replied, while he sank carefully to one knee and his other leg dropped over the cliff edge, his toe groping for a support. "There have been complaints about the foundations of this castle. We do not want Don Pasquale's end to be accelerated by having his sick-room fall out from under him. So I have been called in to examine the underpinnings. I am inclined to suspect Death Watch beetles—does that sound likely to you?"

The opinion of his audience, which had been half-hypnotized into watching in blank stupefacation while Simon meantime levered himself over the ledge until only his chin was above its level, was not revealed because he was suddenly yanked back and replaced by the gunman who had taken his last pot shot from the upper window.

"Come back!" shouted the man, with somewhat idiotic optimism, as he tried to get into an aiming position.

"I'm sorry," said the Saint, "but my union only allows me to climb down. To bring me up you must send an elevator."

The gunman's homicidal zeal was not diminished by this reasonable answer, but he was severely handicapped by the mechanics of the situation. The precipice began at his feet, and the base of the building came almost to its edge on his right. If it had been the opposite way around, or if he had been left-handed, it would have been simplicity itself to poke his head and gun-hand around the corner and bang away. But being one of the right-handed majority, there was no way he could comfortably bring his gun to bear, short of stepping out and resting at least one foot on a cloud. He tried a couple of snap shots without that levitational assistance, but with his hand bent awkwardly back from his wrist the bullets went wide and the recoils almost dislodged him from his insecure stance on the rim of the chasm.

While he struggled with this peculiar problem, his quarry was working steadily down the sheer wall with an unexpected virtuosity that would have won respect from challengers of the Eiger. And by the time he had figured out the possible solution

of lying flat on his stomach and wriggling out over the void for half the length of his chest, prepared from that extension to try a southpaw shot if necessary, he was stung to a scream of frustration by the discovery that his target had meanwhile managed to claw his way around a sufficient bulge in the illusory plane of the cliff to be completely shielded from his line of sight.

While his would-be assassin may have been mentally elaborating excuses for the one that got away, Simon was still a long drop from feeling home and safe. He had done some rock climbing, as he had tried every other hazardous sport in his time, and he had muscles and agility that many professionals might have envied, but he would never have claimed to be an expert mountaineer. High-octane adrenalin was the primitive fuel that drove him, clinging like a limpet to an almost vertical gradient, his toes scrabbling for irregularities that might lend a bare ridge of support, his fingers hooking into grooves and crannies that only centuries of weather had eaten into the unsympathetic stone.

Having no time to be precise or technical, he took risks that no seasoned alpinist would have considered. He surrendered his weight to hand-holds that had not been fully tested, and one of them pulled away, a jagged chunk of rock that crashed down among the trees below, leaving him for one desperate moment without support of any kind, except the friction of his body pressed against the natural wall. Yet even as he slid, his hands were racing over the fissured incline and found a lateral crack. All of his weight came on his fingertips and he swung like a pendulum, the tendons of his wrists cracking aloud with the shock. Then his scratching toes found another miniscule ridge, and he resumed his ingloriously frantic descent.

At infinitely long last something brushed his shoulder which he realized was a fruit-laden branch. With a quick twist he grasped it, swung down to the ground, and took off running through the grove.

Far above him, through the clear air, he heard the grind of a starter and the roar of a car's engine breaking into life. Someone up there had finally realized that there might be better ways of cutting him off towards his destination than from his starting point.

He ran.

A patch of open meadow separated the orchards, and as he crossed it there was a flurry of echoes from high behind him, and something whistled past his ear and thudded into the turf. He accepted this with an equanimity which owed no little to the cold-blooded estimate that

at such a distance a hand gun was approximately as dangerous as a well-hurled pebble. He had a more serious threat to worry about: the howl of an overstressed motor came faintly down to his ears, and a large black limousine, strangely reminiscent of movies about Prohibition days in America, hurtled into view on a road that came over the cliff top near the house and zigzagged down towards the village. Its intentions were obvious from the maniac speed with which it attacked the descent, broadsiding on the turns and throwing up clouds of gravel and dust. Even though his predicament was no longer cliff-hanging, he could still be cut off. . .

The Saint doubled his pace and fairly flew down the more gentle slope, hurdling the tumbled-stone fences, pitting his own speed and freedom of choice against the more devious routes which the faster car was obliged to follow. As soon as he reached the shelter of the next grove, he angled off to the right, a change of course that would be hidden from watchers at the cliff top. The limousine was also invisible now behind the trees, but he could trace its progress by the whine of gears and the chatter of skidding tires. The element of desperate uncertainty was where his path and the road would intersect.

The pain in the back of his skull where he had been bludgeoned had long since been cured or driven out of consciousness by the pressure of more imperative demands on his attention. Another fence rose up ahead, made of the same broken slabs of stone fitted together without mortar, and again he took it like a steeplechaser, without breaking stride to make sure what was beyond. This was reckless, but he had little choice: the sounds of the car were coming much too close to permit leisured reconnaissance. As he cleared the wall, he discovered that the ground beyond had been cut away, making a drop of six feet on the other side—where the road itself was responsible for the cutting. He took the fall easily, touching his hands to the gravel with the force of the impact but instantly springing up again. But in one swift glance around he saw the top of the black sedan over the tops of some young olive trees a scant hundred yards farther up the incline. Only the configuration of the ground and an intervening hairpin bend prevented its occupants from seeing him as well.

In terms of the speed of the approaching vehicle, that advantage represented mere seconds of grace. Rebounding like a rubber ball, Simon took two more immense strides across the road and dived head first over the

lower wall on the other side, landing with a paratrooper's shoulder roll on the ground at the end of it.

A shaved moment later, the car slashed around the bend and screeched to a rubber-rending stop just beyond the place where the Saint had crossed. It was so close that spurted gravel rattled against the wall and the dust floated over his head. If he had been a fraction slower he would have been caught on the road; ten seconds slower in his breakneck run and he would have been trapped in the groves above, which the *mafiosi* were now invading.

Rising up with infinite wariness until he could look over the wall near him, he saw four of them clambering over the higher wall to spread out through the trees. The chauffeur who had navigated the projectile descent of the cliff road still sat at the wheel of the big car, and not much farther was the broad sweat-stained back of Al Destamio himself, shouting orders to his advance pack of hoodlums. Everyone was actively oriented to the upward angles, apparently fully convinced that at that point they must have well outdistanced the Saint and need not bother to look for him below them.

The temptation to counterattack from the rear was almost overwhelming, and if it had been only a matter of Destamio or his driver the Saint would have probably failed nobly to resist it. But the two together, spaced as far apart as they were, constituted just too much risk that any hitch in the taking out of the first might give the second a chance to raise an alarm that would reverse all the convenient preconceptions of the squad that expected the Saint to fall into their arms from above. Reluctantly, he decided that this was a case where commonsensical considerations should outweigh the superficial allures of grandstand glory.

He turned away, rather sadly remembering more juvenile days when he would have chosen otherwise, and melted silently down through the vineyard where he had landed.

He could count on a brief respite while the searchers above vainly combed the upper slopes where they seemed to think they had cornered him. With that preconceived idea, it would take them between half an hour and an hour to convince themselves that he had gone past them and not crawled into some undiscovered hole. Then the word would have to be passed to headquarters, and a more widespread search would have to be organized. This would be a blanket operation that would enlist the entire Mafia and all their

sympathisers, who possibly comprised most of the island's population. Every man's hand would be against him; but he would know where he stood with any man.

The thought was briefly invigorating as he increased his pace. Staying out of the hot clutches of the Mafia might be the most difficult accomplishment of his checkered career; but if he could survive that cliché he might be able to outlast anything.

One stairwayed vineyard led down to another as his giant strides carried him through them towards the valley town. The *contadini* of the outskirts were already awake and scratching at their tiny allotments with medieval mattocks. They seemed to notice Simon only disinterestedly as he passed, as if their tenure under the very shadow of the Mafia allowed them only to observe when specifically called upon to do so. The sight of a hurrying man in a torn shirt coming from the direction of the Mafia mansion evoked no response but hastily averted eyes: they would remember his passage if the correct parties inquired later, but right now they would neither hinder nor help.

Simon dismissed them as ciphers in this desperate game, and made no stop or detour on their account until he reached the first outlying buildings of the town, where he paused briefly to do what little he could do to make himself slightly more presentable.

One shirt-sleeve was unrepairable, split up almost to the shoulder. Ripping off the cuff, he used it as a band on which to roll up the remains of the sleeve. When he rolled up the other sleeve to match, the torn one was hardly noticeable. He brushed the dirt from his hands, dusted his slacks as best he could, and combed his hair with his fingers—wincing slightly when they touched the knot above his occiput, and making another mental entry in the ledger that would have to be balanced with Al Destamio's account when they came to a final settlement. With that, he was as ready to go on as he would ever be.

The nameless town which he had to enter was already coming to life, since like any microcosm of the south it moved more quickly in the cool of the morning in order to doze better during the incinerating afternoon. Before finally entering a narrow alley that would surely lead to the main street, Simon checked backwards to see that his trail was still free of pursuers, and was rewarded with an unexpected and arresting sight. His downward path had widened his visual scope, and now he could see not only his recently deserted prison on the overhanging cliff

but also a more distant mountain rising beyond and dwarfing it, a summit from which a thin plume of smoke coiled lazily upwards.

Even the most superficial student of geological grandeurs could have recognized the symptoms of a dormant volcano; and since there is only one such on the island of Sicily, at the same time the highest in Europe and one of the largest in the world, Simon knew that he must be looking at Mount Etna. And aside from any casual vulcanological interest, it performed the important function of telling him exactly where he was.

To visualize a map of Sicily, as the Saint did, you might think of a piece of pie about to be kicked by the toe of a boot, which is the shape of the Italian peninsula. The resemblance is only in outline, and should not lead to any symbolic inferences. The top side of this pie-wedge is fairly straight and runs almost due east and west. The volcano of Etna is situated in the upper eastern corner of the triangle. Since the Saint was looking towards it, and the sun was rising behind it, the most rudimentary geographical acumen or even the basic training of a boy scout would have been enough to tell him that the road downhill from the unknown town he was entering must run north to join the coastal highway somewhere between Messina and Palermo. To some exigent critics this deduction might still have seemed to fall far short of pinpointing a position, but to Simon Templar it provided a fix from which he would have cheerfully set a course to Mars.

As he reached the central square of the town, he had a clear view of the valley road that bisected it and wandered on down to the now occulted sea. That trail of patched macadam, he knew, was a siren's lure that beckoned only to his death. Though it looked open, it would be the first avenue to be watched, closed, or booby-trapped. The Mafia might not be overly concerned with Destamio's personal problems, but they would be ruthlessly jealous of their own prerogatives, which the Saint had affronted with insulting levity. Therefore all their resources, spread like a spider cancer through the entire community, would be devoted to the simple objective of cutting him down. And the main thoroughfares would be the first and most obvious avenues for them to cover.

Across the square, in front of the town's principal and possibly only hotel, an assortment of early-rising tourists were loading their luggage and their young into various cars. Two families of beaming Bavarians, complete with *lederhosen* and beer bellies, obviously travelling together in identical beetle-nosed Volkswag-

ens; a middle-aged Frenchman with his dependable Peugeot and a conspicuously chic chick who somehow looked a most unconvincing wife; and an oversized station wagon whose superfluous fins and garbage-can-lid rear lights would have revealed its transatlantic origin long before the red and black identification of the American forces in Europe could have been deciphered on its dusty license plate. The gaudy pseudo-Hawaiian shirt worn like a pregnancy smock outside the tired slacks of its proprietor was no disguise for a certain pugnacity of jaw and steeliness of eye which stamp a professional sergeant in peace or war.

Simon's spirits rose another notch. With such a type, opportunity might not be exactly pounding at his door, but at least he could hear it tap.

He waited until the last suitcase had been jammed into the truck-sized rear deck, and the last squalling brat trapped and stowed amidships, and then he approached the near-side window just as the driver was settling in and turning on the engine.

"I hate to make like a hitchhiker," he said, with just the right blend of fellow-American camaraderie combined with undertones of a war-time commission, "but could you drop me off a couple of miles down the valley? I had to bring my car in to be fixed at the garage here, and it won't be done till this evening."

While the sergeant hesitated momentarily, from the ingrained suspicion of all professional sergeants, his wife moved over to make room on the front seat.

"Sure," she said, making up his mind for him like any good American wife. "No trouble at all."

The Saint got in, and they pulled away. By this time, he figured that Destamio and the first pursuit squad might be debating the possibility that they had not after all headed him where they stopped on the road.

"What you doin' around here?" asked the sergeant sociably, after a time.

"Spending a vacation with some cousins," Simon answered casually, knowing that his black hair and tanned complexion would superficially support a fictional Italian ancestry. "They've got a farm down the road a piece. First time I've ever been here—my folks emigrated before I was born."

"Where you from, then?"

"New York."

A trite choice, but one where he knew he could not be caught out on any topographical details, and big enough not to lead into any acquaintance pitfalls of the "Do you know Joe Blow?" pattern.

"We're from Dallas, Texas. We don't get out much into the suburbs."

It was astonishingly easy, and might have tempted anyone to parlay his luck as far as the ride could be stretched. But the Saint had attained his present age mainly because he was not just anyone. Very shortly, his pursuers would extend their search into the town, where they would soon find some loafer in the square who had seen a man answering to Simon's description getting into an unmistakable American car. With the speed of a couple of telephone calls, the word would be flashed ahead to confreres along the littoral, and before the station wagon even reached the coast the highway in both directions would be alive with eyes that would never let it out of their sight. From that moment there would be nowhere he could leave the car without the probability of being observed and followed, while to stay in it would risk an unthinkable involvement of its innocent occupants in any splashy attempts at his own destruction.

Watching the road ahead for any side tracks that could plausibly lead to a farm, he finally spotted a suitable turning and said: "Right here—don't try to take me to the door, you'd have a job turning around to get out again. And thanks a million."

"You're welcome."

Simon got out, and the car shot off as he waved goodbye.

Now until they stopped the station wagon and questioned the driver, Destamio's cohorts would be partially baffled—unless someone realized that a man on foot could travel in any direction, if he was fool enough to climb over a sun-blasted mountain instead of skirting it. Which was precisely the Saint's intention.

But the plan was not as harebrained to him as it might have seemed to a less original fugitive. On a previous visit to Sicily he had driven from Messina to Palermo, and had remarked on the numbers of people waiting at bus stops along the highway, who had apparently landed from boats or lived under rocks by the wayside, since they were nowhere near any visible human habitation. His companion, who knew the island, had pointed out the dusty dirt tracks that wound back between the buttresses of the hills, and explained that higher up in most of the valleys, closer to sources of precious water, there was a hidden village. Though they might be only a few miles apart on the map, the normal route from one to another was down to the sea, along the coast, and back up again—a long way around, but much more attractive in a cli-

mate that discouraged strenuous exertion. To the Saint, however, to do whatever would be most unexpected was far more important than an economy of sweat.

And sweat, in plain common language, was what his eccentricity exacted, in copious quantities. As he climbed higher, so did the sun, making it clear why Sicily had never become the Mecca of midsummer mountain-hikers. To add to its natural disadvantages for such sport, Simon Templar also had to contend not only with the after-effects of a mild concussion but also with the fact that he had had no breakfast, or any other food or drink since last night's dinner.

It was good evidence of his mental as well as his physical toughness that he set and maintained a pace which would not have disgraced a week-end hiker over some gentle undulations in an English autumn. His shirt was already sodden when the terraced groves and vineyards gave up their encroachment on a baked and crumbling mountainside where only straggling shrubs and cacti grew; but the sun only worked harder to imitate the orifice of a blast furnace. More insidious was the temptation to let his mind dwell on thoughts of cool refreshing drinks, which only intensified the craving. The human body can go without food for a month, but dies in a few days without water. Simon was not about to die, but he had never been so thirsty as he was when he reached the summit of the range he had aimed for.

By then it was almost noon, and his brains felt as if they were being cooked inside his skull. The rocks shimmered in the blaze, heat-induced mirages plagued his vision, and the blood pounded in his temples. But if he had chosen the right ridge, he should be able to come down in a valley that would bring him to the sea from a totally different quarter and in a totally different area from where the hunters would be watching for him.

A rustling sound like wind-blown leaves came to him as he rounded a jutting promontory some way below the crest, and he found himself suddenly face to face with three startled goats. They were moth-eaten, dusty, and lean to a point of emaciation which was understandable if their only grazing was the withered herbage of that scorched hillside. Two of them were females with large but not distended udders, and the explanation of that detail dawned on him an instant too late for him to draw back behind the sheltering shoulder of magma. By that time he had seen the goatherd, and seen that the goatherd also saw him.

They stared at each other for a silent moment, the goatherd

looking as surprised as his charges. He was a thin youth as dusty and tattered as the goats, in a faded shirt with the sleeves torn off at the shoulders and pants that had been mended so many times that it was difficult to tell which was the original material and which the patches. A knotted rope served him for a belt, and completed the sum of his wardrobe; the soles of his bare feet must have been callused like hoofs to be able to ignore the abrasive and cauterizing surfaces which were all that his pastures offered them to walk on. He brushed back his uncut mop of hair to get a better view of the extraordinary apparition which had shattered all the precedents of his lonly domain.

"*Buon giorno,*" said the Saint reassuringly. "A beautiful day for a walk in the hills."

"*Sissignore,*" responded the young man politely, to avoid offending an obvious lunatic. He speculated: "You are English?"

Simon nodded, deciding that it was better to accept that assumption than be taken for a mad dog. He sighted a tiny patch of shade under a projecting rock and sat down to rest in it for a minute.

"It was not as hot as this when I started out," he said, in an attempt to partly explain his irrational behavior.

"You must be thirsty," the herdboy said.

Something in Simon's manner had erased his first fear and he came and squatted close by.

"My mouth is so dry that I doubt if I could lick a stamp."

"You would like a drink?"

"I would love one. I would like about six drinks," said the Saint wistfully. "Tall ones, ice-cold. I would not be fussy about what they were. Orange juice, beer, cider, wine, tomato juice, even water. Do you have a refrigerator in a cave anywhere near by?"

"You can have some of my water if you like."

The lad reached behind him and swung into sight a skin bottle that had been hanging down his back, suspended from a loop of gray string. He pulled the cork from the neck and extended the flask to the Saint, who took it in a state of numbed shock.

"And I thought you were kidding. . ."

Simon raised the bottle to his lips and let a trickle of hot, sour, but life-giving wetness moisten his tongue and flow down his throat. At any other time it would have been almost nauseating, but in his condition it was like nectar. He sipped slowly, to extract the maximum humidity from it and to give himself the impression of a prolonged draught without actually draining the container. He returned the skin still more than

half full, and sighed gratefully.

"*Mille grazie.* You may have saved my life."

On the other hand, the youth might equally prove to be a contributor to the Saint's death. There was no way to make him forget the encounter, short of knocking him on the head and pitching his body into the nearest ravine, which would have been a somewhat churlish return for his good Samaritanism. But eventually the goatherd would hear about the foreigner who was being sought, and would tell about their meeting, and would be able to indicate which way the Saint had gone. With one quirk of fate, Simon had lost much of the advantage that he had toiled so painfully to gain—how much, depended on how soon the boy's story reached one of the search parties. But that was only another hazard that had to be accepted.

There was nothing more to be gained by perching on that ledge like a becalmed buzzard and brooding about it. Simon climbed to his feet again, counting the compensation of the brief rest and refreshment, and pointed down the steep slope.

"There is a village down that way?"

"*Sissignore.* It is where I live. Would you like me to guide you?"

"No, if I keep going downhill I must come to it."

"After you pass around that hill there with the two dead trees on the side you will see it. But I have to go back there before long in any case."

"I am in a hurry, and I have already interfered with you too much," said the Saint hastily. "Thank you again, and may your goats multiply like rabbits."

He turned and plunged on down the slope with a dynamic purposefulness designed to leave the lad too far behind for further argument before any such argument could suggest itself.

He only slackened his pace when he felt sure, without turning to look back, that the goatherd had been left shrugging helplessly at the incontestable arbitrariness of Anglo-Saxons, and when the precipitousness of the path reminded him that a twisted ankle could eventually prove just as fatal as a broken neck. He had to work his way across a perilous field of broken scree on the direct course he had set for the two dead trees which had been pointed out as his next landmark, but soon after he passed them he scrambled over another barren hump to be greeted by a vista that justified all the toil and sweat of its attainment.

In the brown hollow of the hills far below clustered the whitewashed buildings of an-

other village, with a road leading away from them down the widening canyon that could ultimately meander nowhere but to the coast. His venture seemed to have paid off.

His descent from the heights seemed like a sleigh ride only by comparison with the preceding climb. A steep downhill trail, pedestrians whose walking is confined to city pavements might be surprised to learn, is almost as tiring as an uphill: the body's weight does not have to be lifted, but its gravitational pull has to be cushioned instead, and the shocks come on the unsprung heels which make the muscles of the thighs work harder to soften the jolts. It was true that he had had a cupful of water to drink, but to boil it off there was an afternoon heat more intense if possible than the morning. Having breakfasted on nothing but thin air, he was now sampling more of the same menu for lunch. If he had been inclined to self-pity, he could have summarized that he was parched with thirst, faint with hunger, stumbling with fatigue, and baked to the verge of heat prostration; but he never permitted himself such an indulgence. On the contrary, renewed hope winged his steps and helped him to forget exhaustion.

Nevertheless, a more coldly impersonal faculty warned him that he couldn't continue drawing indefinitely on nothing but will-power and his stored-up reserves of strength. He would have to find liquid and solid sustenance in the village. If he by-passed it, he might be able to reach the coast on foot, but he would be in no shape to cope with any minions of the Mafia that he might meet there or run into on the road. The risk of attracting attention in town had to be balanced against the physical and mental improvement that its resources of food and drink could give him.

As he worked his way closer to it, suffering all the added disadvantages of pathfinding as the price of refusing the young goatherd's offer of guidance, the echoing clangor of the inevitable church bell reached him, striking the half-hour which his wrist watch confirmed to be one-thirty. Ten minutes later he slithered by accident across a well-worn path which would probably have brought him as far with half the effort if he could have been shown it, but which at least eased the last quarter-hour's slog to the most outlying cottages.

But the delay had not necessarily penalized him. In fact, it might have improved the conditions for his arrival. The reassembly of the inhabitants under their own roofs, and the serious business of the *colazione*, the mid-day and most important meal of the southern peasant,

would have run their ritual courses, and a contentedly inflated populace should still be pampering the work of their digestive juices in the no less hallowed formality of the siesta. Even if any of them had already been alerted, which in itself seemed moderately unlikely, for a while there would be the fewest eyes open to notice him.

The pitifully stony terraces through which he made the last lap of his approach, the desiccated crops and scattering of stunted trees, prepared him in advance for the poverty-stricken aspect of the town. Indeed, it was hard to imagine how even such a modest community could wrest a subsistence from such starved surroundings—unless one had had previous immunization to such miracles of meridional ecology. But the Saint knew that within that abject microcosm could be found all the essentials that the fundaments of civilization would demand.

Like all the Sicilian villages of which it was prototypical, it had no streets more than a few feet wide. The problems of motorized traffic were still in its fortunate future. Its twisted alleys writhed between those houses which were not prohibitively Siamesed to their neighbors, only to converge unanimously on what had to be deferentially called the town square. Having accepted the inevitability of ploughing that obvious route, Simon strode boldly and as if he knew exactly where he was heading through a debris-cluttered alley which squeezed him between two high walls overhung with wilted flowers into the central *piazza.* The overlooking windows were tightly shuttered, lending an atmosphere of timeless somnolence to the scene.

The Saint's pace slowed into a pace compatible with his surroundings, trying to tone down obtrusive brashness, for the benefit of any wakeful observer, without inversely suggesting nefarious stealth. But there was no sign of any interest in his deportment, or even that his entrance or his mere existence had been discerned at all. The pervading heat dwelt there like a living presence in the absence of any other life. Nothing whatever moved except the flies circling a mangy dog that lay in a dead sleep in one shaded doorway.

There was no central fountain in the square; but somewhere near, he was sure, there had to be a town tap, or pump, or at least a horse-trough. He walked around the western and southern sides of the perimeter, keeping close to the buildings in order to benefit by their shade, and wondering how long it would be before the first food shop would re-open.

"Hi, Mac! You like a nice clean shave an' freshen up?"

The voice almost made him jump, coming in heavily accented but fluent English from the open doorway he was passing. Overhead there was a crudely painted sign that said PARRUCCHERIA. A curtain of strings of beads, southern Europe's primitive but effective form of fly barrier, screened the interior from sight, and he had assumed that a more solid portal had been left open merely to aid the circulation of air while the barber snored somewhere in the back of the shop; but apparently that artist was already awake and watching from his lair for any potential customer to pass within hooking range.

Simon, having been halted in his tracks, grated a hand across his thirty-six-hour beard and pretended to weigh the merits of the invitation. In reality he was weighing the few coins in his pocket and considering whether he could afford it. A delay of a quarter-hour or so should make little difference, and might be more than made up by the new vigor he could generate in such an interlude of complete repose. A clean-up would not only make him look less like a desperate fugitive, but would give him a psychological boost to match its outward effect. There would certainly be water—that thought alone almost jet-propelled him into the shop—and during the ministrations he might elicit much information . . . or even something more mundane to chew on.

The arguments whirled through his head in a microfraction of the time it takes to set them down, and his choice was made well within the limits of any ordinary decision.

"You sold me, bub," he said, and went in.

Dim coolness wrapped him around, the perpetually surprising phenomenon of thick-walled architecture that had evolved its own system of air-conditioning before Carrier tried to duplicate it mechanically. In the temporary partial blindness of the interior, he allowed himself to be guided into a barber chair that felt positively voluptuous, and to be swathed to the neck in a clean sheet. Then, as his eyes grew more accustomed to the half-light, he perceived something which he thought at first must be a hallucination conjured up by his thirst-tortured senses. A white foam-plastic box stood against the wall, filled with chunks of ice from which projected the serrated caps of four bottles.

"What's that you've got in the ice?" he asked in an awed voice.

"Some beer, Mac. I keep a few bottles around in case anyone wants it."

"For sale?"

"You bet."

"I'll buy."

It took the barber four steps to the cooler, where the ice rattled crisply and stimulatingly as a bottle was withdrawn, and four steps back; each step seemed to take an eternity as the Saint counted the footfalls. It took another age before the top popped off and he was allowed to grasp the cold wet shape which seemed more exquisitely conceived than the most priceless Ming vase.

"*Salute,*" he said, and emptied half of it in one long delicious swallow.

"Good 'ealth," said the barber.

Simon delayed the second installment while he luxuriated in the first impact of cool and tasty liquid on his system.

"I suppose you wouldn't have anything around that I could nibble?" he said. "I always think beer tastes better with a bite of something in between."

"I got-a some good salami, if you like that."

"I'm crazy about good salami."

The barber disappeared through another bead curtain at the back of the room, and returned after a few minutes with several generous slices on a chipped plate. By that time Simon had finished his bottle and could indicate with an expressive gesture that another would be needed to wash down the sausage.

"What made you speak to me in English?" he asked curiously, while it was being opened.

"The way you was lookin' aroun', I can see you never been in dis town before," said the barber complacently. "So I start-a thinkin', how you got your last hair-cut an' how you dress an' carry yourself. People from different countries all got their own face expressions an' way of walkin'. You put a German in an Italian suit an' he still don't look Italian. I work-a sixteen years in Chicago an' I seen all kinds."

He was trending into his sixties, and with his smoothly shaven and powdered blue jowls and balding head with a few carefully nurtured strands of hair stretched across it he was himself a sort of out-dated but cosmopolitan barber-image. How and why he had gone to America and returned to this Sicilian dead-end was a story that Simon had no particular desire to know, but which he was sure he would be hearing soon, if there was any truth in the traditional loquacity of tonsorial craftsmen.

While he could still do some talking himself, however, before being partly gagged by lather and the need to maintain facial immobility, the Saint thought it worth trying to implant some protective fiction about himself.

"And only an English-speaking tourist would be nutty enough to hike all the way up here from the coast in the middle of a day like this," he said.

If that version took hold, it might briefly dissociate him from someone else who was believed to have come over the crest from the other direction. Perhaps very briefly indeed, but nothing could be despised that might help to confuse the trail.

The barber deftly washed the dust of the hills from the Saint's face and replaced it with a soothing balm of suds. His inscrutably lugubrious air might have seemed to mask the thought anyone who was not condemned to permanent residence in that backwater of civilization should not complain about the purely transitory discomfort of a mere day's visit, no matter how arduous.

"You like-a ver' much walking, I guess?"

"Somebody sold me on getting off into the back country and finding the real Sicily that the ordinary tourists miss," Simon answered between swigs at his second bottle. "Unfortunately I didn't ask all the details I should have about the gradients and the climate. I'm glad I saw this town, but I can't say I'm looking forward to walking back down that road I came up. Does there happen to be a taxi in town, or anyone who drives a car for hire?"

"No, nothing like-a that, Mac." The barber was stropping his formidable straight-edge razor. "There's a bus twice a day, mornin' an' evenin'."

"What time?"

"Six o'clock, both times. Whichever you choose, you can't-a go wrong."

Far from feeling that he had made a joke, the barber seemed to sink into deeper gloom before this illustration of the abysmal rusticity of the campagna where ill fortune had stranded him. He placed his thumb on the Saint's jawbone and pulled to tighten the skin, and scraped down despondently with his ancient blade.

"You're a big-a fool to get in trouble wit' da Mafia," he said without a change of intonation.

It was an immortal tribute to the Saint's power of self-control that he didn't move a fraction of a millimeter in response to that sneak punch-line. The razor continued its downward track, skimming off a broad band of soap and stubble, but the epidermis behind it was left smooth and bloodless where the slightest twitch on his part would have registered a nick as surely as a seismograph. The cutting edge rested like a feather on the base of his throat for a moment that seemed endless, while the barber looked down glumly into his eyes and Simon stared back in unflinching immobility.

Then the barber shrugged and turned away to wipe the lather from his lethal weapon on the edge of the scarred rubber dish

kept for that purpose.

"I don't understand you," said the Saint, to keep the conversation going.

"You bet you do, Mac. I been sittin' 'ere lookin' out, you can see down da road to da first turn, an' that ain't where you come from. No, sir. You come over da mountain from Mistretta, an' you sure got 'em stirred up over there."

He took aim with the razor again, at the Saint's other cheek, but this time it was easier for Simon to wait passively for the contact. If the man had any serious butchering intentions, he would scarcely have passed up his first and best opportunity.

"What happened in Mistretta?" Simon asked, studiously speaking like a ventriloquist without using any external muscles.

"I don' know an' I don' wanna. I don' want-a no beef wit' da Mafia. But dey been onna phone, I got one-a da t'ree phones in dis crummy dump, an' I gotta pass on da word. I hear how you look, how you speak English, how everyone should watch for you."

There was no point in any more pretense.

"Do they know I came over here?"

"Naw. It's-a kinda general warning. They don' know where you are, an' everybody calls up everybody else to keep-a da eye open."

"So you weren't being such a Sherlock Holmes after all when you spotted me."

"Don' ride me, mister. I wanted to 'ear you talk, find out what kinda feller you are."

"Why didn't you cut my throat just now when you had the chance, and maybe earn yourself a reward?"

"Listen, I don't 'ave to kill you myself. I coulda just let you walk by, then talked on da phone. Let da Mafia do the job. I woulda been sittin' pretty, an' mos' likely pick up a piece o' change too. So don' ride me."

"Sorry," said the Saint. "But you must admit it's a bit surprising for anyone to find such a pal in these parts."

The barber wiped his razor and stropped it again with slow slapping strokes, and examined the gleaming edge against the light from the doorway.

"I ain't your pal, but I ain't-a no pal o' da Mafia neither. They done nothin' for me I couldn't 'a done better for myself. Kick in, protection, just like-a da rackets in Chicago. Only in Chicago I make-a more money, I can afford it better. I know da score. I shoulda stayed where I was well off; but I thought I could take it easy here on my Social Security an' what I'd-a saved up, an' just work enough to pay da rent. I should-a 'ad my 'ead examined."

"That still doesn't explain why you didn't turn me in."

"Listen, when I get dis call, dey gimme your name. Simon Templar. Probably don' mean nothin' to dese peasants; but I been around. I know who you are. I know you made trouble for lotsa racketeers. Dat's okay with me. I'd-a turn you in in a second, if it was my neck or yours. But I don' mind if I can get you out of a jam without get-a involved. I'll even tell you 'ow to get outa dis town—"

Suddenly there was the snarl of a motor-scooter's exhaust coming up from the valley and roaring into the square like a magnified hornet with hiccups. The barber stopped all movement to listen, and Simon could see the blood drain out of his face. The scooter's tempestuous arrival at this torpid hour of the day obviously meant trouble, and trouble could only mean the Mafia. While the barber stood paralyzed, the mobile ear-splitter added a screech of brakes to its gamut of sound effects, and crescendoed to a stop outside the shop with a climactic clatter that presaged imminent disintegration.

"Quick!" Simon whispered. "A wet towel!"

Galvanized at last into action by a command that connected helpfully with established reflexes of professional habit, the barber stumbled over to the dual-purpose cooler and dredged up a sodden serviette from under the ice and remaining bottles. He scuttled back and draped it skilfully around and over the Saint's face as ominous footsteps clomped on the cobbles, and the beaded door-curtain rattled as someone parted it and pushed through.

It was an interesting situation, perhaps more appealing to an audience than to a participant. The barber was in a blue funk and might say anything; in fact, to betray the Saint, he didn't even need to say anything, he only had to point to the customer in the chair. He owed Simon nothing, and had frankly admitted that he would not hesitate over a choice between sympathy and his own skin. The Saint could only wait, blind and defenseless, but knowing that any motion might precipitate a fatal crisis. Which was not merely nerve-racking, but diluted his capacity to enjoy the exhilarating chill of the refrigerated wetness on his face.

Out of necessity, he lay there in a supine immobility that called for reserves of self-dominance that should have been drained by the razor-edge ordeal of a few minutes ago, while the rider rattled questions and commands in incomprehensible dialect. Mercifully it did not go on beyond the capacity of his nervous endurance. The barber gave brief and equally incomprehensible answers, but at last the

curtain rattled again and the footsteps stomped away outside and faded along the sidewalk.

The towel was snatched from Simon's face and the chair tilted up with precipitate abruptness.

"Get out," rasped the barber, from a throat tight with panic.

"What was he saying?" Simon asked, stepping quietly down.

"Get-a goin'!" The man pointed at the door with a shaking forefinger. "He's a messenger from the Mafia, come-a to call out all da *mafiosi* in dis village. They found out you didn't go down to da coast from Mistretta, so now they gonna search all-a da hills. They don' know you been here yet, but in a coupla minutes they'll be out lookin' everywhere an' you ain't-a got a chance. They kill you, an' if they find out you been 'ere dey kill-a me too! So get out!"

The Saint was already at the door, peering cautiously through the curtain.

"What was that way you were going to tell me to get out of town?"

"*Fuòri!*"

Only the fear of being heard outside muted what would have been a scream into a squeak, but Simon knew that he had used up the last iota of hospitality that was going to be extended to him. If he strained it another fraction, the trembling barber was almost certain to try to whitewash himself by raising the alarm.

The one consolation was that in his frantic eagerness to be rid of his visitor the barber had no time to discuss payment for the beer and salami or even for the shave, and the Saint was grateful to be able to save the few coins in his pocket for another emergency.

"Thanks for everything, anyway, pal," he said, and stepped out into the square.

Propped upright in the gutter outside, the unguarded scooter was a temptation; but Simon Templar had graduated to automobiles long before vehicles of that type were introduced, and it would have taken him a perilous interval of fumbling to find out how to start it. Even then, it would have provided anything but unobtrusive transportation; indeed, the noise he had heard it make under full steam would be more help to any posse in pursuit of him than a pack of winged bloodhounds. Regretfully he decided that its locomotive advantages were not for him.

He strolled across the square to the corner from which the main road ran downhill, schooling himself to avoid any undue semblance of haste, but feeling as ridiculous as an elephant trying to pass unnoticed through an Eskimo settlement. The first few shutters were opening, the first

few citizens emerging torpidly from their doors, and he was acutely aware that in any such isolated community any stranger was a phenomenon to be observed and analyzed and speculated upon. The best that he could hope for was to be taken for an adventurous tourist who had strayed off the beaten track, or somebody's visiting cousin from another province who had not yet been introduced around. When there was no outcry after the first few precarious seconds, it suggested that the barber had ultimately decided to keep quiet: if he shouted as late as this, the messenger might remember the towel-draped anonymity in the chair and wonder . . . Therefore the Saint could still hope to slip through the trap before the jaws closed.

And as each stride took him farther from the town center and the risk of total encirclement, his spirits rose to overtake the physical resurgence that the interlude of refreshment and recuperation in the barber shop had quickened—so much that when he saw a hulking and beady-eyed ruffian staring fixedly at him through every step that led through one of the last blocks of the village buildings, it was only a challenge to the oldest recourse of Saintly impudence, and he walked deliberately and unswervingly into the focus of the stare until it wavered uncertainly before the arrogant confidence of his approach.

"*Ciao,*" said the Saint condescendingly, with a superior Neapolitan accent. "He will be coming in a few minutes. But do not glare at him like that, or he will turn back and run."

"What am I to do, then?" mumbled the bully.

"Pretend to be busy with something else. After he passes, whistle *Arrivederci, Roma,* very loudly. We shall hear it, and be waiting for him."

He strode on, disdaining even to pause for acknowledgement of the order, though the back of his neck prickled.

But it worked. He had broken another cordon, and the way he had done it proved how much he had recuperated. He felt his morale beginning to soar again. More nets would be cast, but his inexhaustible flair for the unexpected would take him through them.

In a few more moments he had left the last cottages behind, and then a curve in the road took him altogether out of sight of the village and the watcher on the outskirts who should now be watching the opposite way anyhow.

He quickened his step to a gait which from any distance would still have looked like a walk, attracting less attention than a run, but whose deceptively lengthened stride covered

the ground at a speed which most men would have had to run to keep up with. At the same time his eyes ceaselessly scanned the barren ridges on either side, alert for any other sentinels who might be watching the road from the heights. The road wound steadily downhill, making his breakneck pace possible in spite of the stifling heat, and he kept it up without sparing himself, knowing that the canyon he followed could be either his salvation or a death trap.

If he had not met the goatherd on the summit, and then had to stop in the last village, he might have had more latitude of choice, perhaps spending a night in the trackless hills and continuing across country until he could drop down into Cefalu, which he should have been able to locate from some peak if he was in the approximate area which he had deduced from his glimpse of Etna. But that was impossible now after where he had been seen. So far he was ahead of the chase, and had succeeded in outthinking it as well, but that advantage would be lost as soon as the reports filtered in and were coordinated. His only hope now was to reach the coast before he was completely cut off, and lose himself in the crowds which could still be treacherous but could give better cover than any scrawny growth on the stark uplands.

From somewhere ahead came a plaintive squealing sound that slowed his headlong course as he tried to identify it. It repeated itself regularly, but grew no louder; if anything, it seemed to grow fainter as he went slower. He resumed his pace with redoubled alertness, and the intermittent squealing became gradually louder, showing that it must come from something that he was overtaking on the road.

Prudence should have dictated holding back for a safe distance, but curiosity was equally cogent, and besides he could not afford to be slowed down indefinitely by some nameless obstruction. Instead, he accelerated again until he won a glimpse of it.

Soon the road made two consecutive horseshoe bends, bringing him to a clear view of the next level down the rutted track, where he saw that he was being preceded by a *carretta siciliana*, the picturesque Sicilian mule cart made famous by fifty million picture postcards. The rhythmic creaking which he had heard came from its inadequately lubricated hubs. It carried no load, and—except for its nodding driver—no passengers; but a bacchanalian scene of country maidens dancing with flower-wreathed satyrs graced its sides, while intricate patterns of fruit and foliage revolved on the fellies of its high wheels in an

explosion of primary colors that pained the eyes.

Without hesitation Simon turned off the road, avalanched through the intervening gully, and raced into the wake of the trundling cart.

As he caught up with it, he saw that the driver, a gray-whiskered rustic, appeared to be asleep, the reins draped limply from one hand and his hat tilted over his eyes, but he raised his head and scowled down as the Saint came level with him.

"*Buon giorno,*" Simon said in the standard greeting, falling back to a walk without a hint of short-windedness to betray that he had been hurrying.

"You would not say it was a good day if you had to listen to my wife's tongue cracking like a whip all morning," said the driver crossly.

"*Cattiva giornata,*" amended the Saint, ever flexible in such situations.

"*Hai ragione.* It is the worst kind of day. Have a drink."

The man produced a damp bottle from a mound of rags between his feet and proferred it. Unlike the goatherd's wineskin, this flagon contained its proper beverage, and was even moderately cool from the evaporation of the wet cloths in which it had been nested.

Simon enjoyed a second long pull and handed it back. The driver seized the excuse to have one himself, and it was obvious from the way he weaved the bottle up and down that it was not his first drink of the day. The Saint could not be discourteous, and when the bottle was handed him again he forced himself to accept another pleasant swallow of the thin slightly acid wine, walking with one hand on the cart to balance himself while the patient power plant trudged phlegmatically along.

"Where are you going?" asked the driver.

"To Palermo," Simon replied.

It was in his mind that if that statement were ever relayed to Al Destamio, the hoodlum's devious psychology would automatically assume that he was heading the opposite way, towards Messina; whereas he really did hope to get back to Palermo. He had left too many loose and unfinished ends there, of which Gina was not the least troubling.

From far behind up the valley, at the very limit of audibility, came something like the buzzing of a distant hornet, which swelled rapidly to the proportions of an airplane's drone and then to a rattle like a pneumatic drill gone berserk. It was no feat of memory for Simon to recognize the sound: he had heard it all too recently—unless there were two internal combustion engines in the area with identi-

cally obnoxious exhausts.

The envoy was coming back down from the village. And on the way he had probably spoken with the picket on the outskirts . . .

"Let us keep each other company," said the Saint, and with a nimble leap he swung himself up to the seat beside the outraged driver.

"Who asked you?" demanded the latter in befuddled resentment. "What are you doing?"

"Joining you so that we can hurry to the nearest *vinaio* and buy some more of that excellent beverage which you have been sharing so generously with me. And here is the price of the next round."

Simon slapped the remaining change from his pocket on to the wooden seat. Small as the sum was, it was sufficient to buy two or three liters of wine at the depressed local prices. The peasant looked at it with heavy-lidded eyes, and picked it up without further protest. He even let Simon take another drag from the bottle before he reclaimed it.

The Saint relinquished his grip and listened calculatingly to the thrumming roar that was now reverberating from the valley walls.

"Drink up," he said encouragingly, "and let me do your work for you."

As he spoke, he gently detached the reins from the other's limp hold. The erstwhile driver turned and opened his mouth for another outburst of indignation, to be greeted with a smile of such seraphic innocence and friendliness that he forgot what he was going to complain about and wisely settled for another swig at the flagon. As his head went all the way back to drain the last gulp from it, the cart lurched over a well-chosen rut and his hat fell off. Simon caught it neatly and put it on his own head, tilted down over his eyes. In an instant his shoulders slumped with the defeat of the overworked and underfed, and the reins drooped as listlessly from his fingers as they had from those of the previous holder.

The timing and the performance were perfect. As the motor-scooter blatted deafeningly up behind and hurtled past, the rider should have seen only a pair of local peasants, the younger one dozing over the reins, the older one groping foggily for something he seemed to have lost in the back of the cart.

Nevertheless the courier jammed on his brakes and skidded to a halt in a billowing cloud of dust, squarely across the road in front of them. From the fact that he did not threaten them with a weapon, Simon could still hope that it was only a routine check, a matter of ask-

ing the cartmen if they had seen anything of the quarry. His crude disguise might still be effective, enhanced as it was by his authentically local companion and the wagon they were riding in.

"*Alt!*" shouted the messenger. "I want to talk to you!"

In spite of the torrid temperature, he wore the short black leather blouse required by the protocol of his fraternity, inside which he must have enjoyed all the amenities of a portable turkish bath; but as he pushed back his goggles Simon realized that he had seen him before, even though they had been hidden from each other in the barber's shop. It was one of the stone-faced security guards who had lurked sleeplessly around the marble columns of Don Pasquale's *palazzo* above Mistretta.

With every faculty pitilessly aware of its thin margin for survival, the Saint lazily flicked the reins to urge the jenny as close as possible to the gunman—just in case . . .

"What kind of way is that to talk to anyone?" grumbled the chariot's owner, blinking perplexedly at the interception.

Then, as he turned to his passenger for confirmation, he saw for the first time something that drove the more complex affront completely out of his fumbling mind.

"You stole my hat, *ladrone!*" he squawked.

He reached to retrieve the disputed headgear, but his alcoholic aim combined with Simon's instinctive divergence only succeeded in knocking it off the Saint's head. It fell almost at the feet of the startled scooterist, who had moved around to the side of the cart for less stentorian conversation, and whose reciprocal recognition was a coruscating gem of over-statement.

Then the *mafioso's* right hand darted inside his jacket for the hardware that he should have displayed from the beginning.

Simon Templar moved even faster. He shifted sideways and swung his outside leg faster than the gunman could disengage his gun, and there was a distinct and satisfying crunch as the toe of his shoe caught the thug accurately in the side of the temple.

The man folded quietly to the ground and lay face down in the dirt.

Simon was leaping down for the clincher even while his opponent was falling, but no further effort was necessary. The scooter jockey had lost all interest in his mission, and would not be likely to regain it for a long time.

The Saint swiftly took possession of the half-drawn automatic, and tucked it inside his shirt under the waistband of his trousers where his belt would

hold it in place. Then he ran through the man's other pockets, and came up with a switchblade knife and a well-stuffed wallet. He looked up from it to find that his travelling companion had clambered down from the cart and was staring with mounting bewilderment at the sundry components of the scene.

"What is this all about?" pleaded the cart-driver distractedly.

Simon faced his next problem. The old man would inevitably be grilled by the Mafia before long, and he was likely to have an uncomfortably hard time absolving himself of complicity in the Saint's escape. Unless he was provided with evidence that would convince even the hard-boiled *mafiosi* that he was only another hapless fellow-victim of the Saint's lengthening list of atrocities.

There was an inordinate number of five-thousand-*lire* notes in the wallet, besides other denominations, and Simon extracted four of them and tucked them away under a sack of melons in the cart, while the driver gaped at him.

"If I gave those to you now, they might search you and find them," he said. "Say nothing about them, and leave them there until you get home. Also, when you are questioned, remember how I jumped on your cart and forced you to let me stay there. Now, I am sorry to repay you so unkindly, but it will hurt you less than if the Mafia thought you had helped me."

"What is this talk of the *Mafia?*" muttered the other blearily, swaying a little.

"Look at those birds in the sky," said the Saint, steadying him; and as the man raised his chin he hit him under it as crisply and scientifically as he knew how.

The driver crumpled without a sound into another peaceful siesta.

For a second time Simon was tempted by the scooter, purely for its ground-covering potential; and now he might be able to afford a little time to unravel its mechanical secrets. But nothing less than a major operation would silence it, and he was still in a situation where stealth seemed to offer more advantages than speed.

He fired a single shot into its gas tank to eliminate it from further participation in the pursuit, and set off again at a mile-eating trot trying to ignore the heat.

The mountain road twisted and doubled back upon itself like a tortured serpent. At some of the turns, where no unscaleable cliff or other geological barrier intervened, a rough footpatch short-circuited the loop for the benefit of pedestrians. The

Saint took advantage of all of them without slackening speed, although some of them dropped at forty-five degree angles and any slip might have meant violent injury.

The slopes were broken and rough, with little but cactus and thorny bushes holding their superficial shale together, and twice he picked his own route across the pebble-strewn beds of gullies gouged by the torrents of some mythical rainy season rather than following even the slightly more cautious trail worn by previous short-cutters.

He was in the middle of one of these when he heard the anguished whine of an automobile's straining gear-box coming up the valley from below, and he did not need to call on his clairvoyant gifts to divine that no innocent tourist conveyance would be in such a screaming rush to get to the drab *cittadina* at the head of that forsaken gorge.

There was no cover in the flat stream bed, and he would be instantly noticeable from anything crossing the stone bridge forty yards away. The bridge itself offered the only possible concealment, but that meant running towards the approaching car with the certainty of being still more conspicuous if he failed to win the race. Simon sprinted with grim determination, the loose rocks spurting from under his feet and the shrill grind of the car coming closer with terrifying rapidity. He dived under the shadow of the bridge's single arch only a heartbeat before the car rumbled over it and yowled on up the grade.

The Saint allowed himself half a minute to be sure it was out of sight, and to let the heaving of his lungs subside. Then he climbed the bank to the road above.

His decision not to try to help himself to the scooter had vindicated itself even more promptly than he had anticipated.

But now, through a gap in the hills ahead, he could see the benign blue Mediterranean less than a mile away.

It was only a question of whether he could reach it before the hunters turned around and overtook him again.

VI: How the Saint enjoyed another Reunion, and Marco Ponti introduced Reinforcements.

Simon knew how far he had come from where he had abandoned the cart, and could figure how long it would take the second automobile to climb to that spot. In his mind's eye, as he ran, he saw the car braking, the examination of the sleeping scooterist, the reviving and questioning of the peasant. In that way he kept a sort of theoretical

clock on the progress of developments behind him against which he could continuously measure his chances of reaching the coast before the pursuit turned their car around—in itself a substantially time-consuming maneuver on that narrow road—and set off to overtake him. And his spirits rose with every stride as his glimpses of the sea came closer and the picture in his mind was still not frantically ominous.

Even in his athletic prime he would have had to leave the four-minute mile to the specialists, but on a downhill course and under the spur of life preservation he thought he could come close. And on the highway there would be buses and trucks, and beside it the coastal railway as well . . .

Every run of bad cards must have a break, however brief, as every gambler knows; and as the Saint reached the main road at last, and his visualization of the most imminent menace still had the warriors up the hill only now looking for a place to turn their oversize chariot, it seemed to him that his turn was veritably setting in. For less than a hundred yards away on his right, a heavily laden *autobus* was grinding noisily towards him, with the inspiring name PALERMO on the front to indicate its destination.

There were no other vehicles in sight at this moment, and no surly characters with artillery in their pockets to bar his way. The next steps towards escape only had to be taken across the highway, and called for no additional effort beyond flagging down the driver.

Brakes protested, and the bus lurched to a stop. Simon climbed in, the door slammed behind him, and he was on his way again.

But as he paid his fare, he felt that his arrival was causing a minor stir among the passengers. It was a local bus, and the riders seemed to consist mostly of regional habitants and their produce, progeny, and purchases. Perhaps that was the cause of their interest: the Saint was a stranger and obviously a different type, and for lack of anything better to do they would study and speculate about him. Yet there seemed to be an undercurrent of tension running counter to this simple bucolic curiosity. Unless he was excessively selfconscious, he felt as if the other passengers were allowing him far more room than they gave each other. In fact, he had a distinct impression that they were moving as far away from him as the packed conditions would allow.

Considering the aromas of garlic and honest sweat which pervaded the interior in multiple combinations with other less readily recognizable perfumes, it

was somewhat disturbing to speculate on what exotic odor he might be diffusing about which even the best Sicilian wouldn't tell him. Perhaps he was being unduly sensitive; but the events of that day and the previous night would have undermined anyone's confidence in his popularity or social magnetism.

He tried his most innocent and endearing smile on one of the women nearest to him, who was staring into his face with a fixed intensity which suggested either extreme myopia or partial hypnosis, and she crossed herself hurriedly and squirmed back into the engulfing crowd with a look of startled panic.

He hadn't been imagining things. Someone had already identified him, and the whispered word had been passed around.

The fact could be read now in the tense lines of their bodies, their petrified immobility or nervous fidgeting, and the way their eyes fastened on him and then slid away when he looked in their direction. The Saint's description had clearly been circulated throughout the entire district, with promises of reward for finding and/or threats of punishment for hiding him, and in every crowd there was likely to be one who had heard it.

There didn't seem to be any Mafia hirelings on the bus itself, or they would already have gone into action; but he could expect no allies either. None of these people might actively try to attack him, nor would they give him any aid or comfort. Even if they were not sympathizers with the Mafia, they had been terrorized for so long that they would do exactly what the organization had ordered.

The bus ground protestingly up the grades and clattered recklessly down the alternating slopes that made up for them, obedient to the latent death-wish of the normal Italian driver; and with each kilometer the suspense drew tauter, but not from the inherent uncertainties of Sicilian public transportation.

Sometimes the conveyance stopped to pick up new travellers or to let others off; and Simon did not need extrasensory perception to know that as soon as telephones could be reached the wires would be humming with reports of his sighting.

And at each stop there was a rearrangement of seating and standing room, until there were only men around him, uneasy but grim. He wondered how much longer it would be before one of them might be tempted to try for a medal, and he moved his hand to rest it near the butt of the gun under his shirt.

If the pressure seemed to be creeping too close to an explosion point he would have to get off before Palermo. It might

be a wise precaution in any case. He had no idea how long the full trip would take, but it would certainly be long enough for a welcoming delegation to muster at the terminus. The equation of survival that had to be solved required a blind guess at the unknown length of time he could stay with the bus to gain the maximum escape mileage, before warnings telephoned ahead would have a reception committee assembled and waiting for him at the next stop.

He had been keeping most of his attention on the other riders, who had packed themselves closer to suffocation in their desire to keep beyond contamination range of him, but he had been careful to reserve some portion of his awareness for the outside world through which they travelled. He was not concerned with noting all the spots of scenic interest, but with observing any other vehicles whose occupants might evince unusual interest in the one he rode in. And now his circumspection suddenly paid off. A large American sedan pulled around from behind the bus with a screaming horn, as if to pass it, and then simply stayed level with it, while swarthy faces carefully scanned the interior.

Trying not to make any sharp conspicuous movement, Simon edged farther towards the opposite side, bending his knees and slumping his spine to diminish his height, and trying to keep the heads of other passengers between the parallel car and the smallest segment of his face which would let him keep an eye on it and its occupants.

It was a good try, but there was a typically neutralist consensus against it. As his fellow travellers also became aware of the car keeping alongside, they separated and shrank away, either as a pharisaic way of pointing him out without pointing, or to remove themselves from the line of fire if there was to be any shooting. Either way, the result was disastrously the same. A lane opened up across the bus, with passengers trampling each other's corns on both sides but leaving a clear space between Simon and the windows. Even the seated riders found themselves suddenly irked by the burden on their buttocks, and got up to join the sardine pack of standees.

Simon Templar, willy-nilly, was given as unobstructed a view of the men in the car as they were given of him.

But after the first glance there was only one face that held his attention: the face of the man in front, beside the driver. A fat, reddened, unshaven face that cracked in a lipless grin like a triumphant lizard as the recognition became mutual.

The face of Al Destamio.

Simon wished he had been wearing a hat, so that he could have raised it in a mocking salute that seemed to be the only possible gesture at the moment. Instead, he had to be content with giving his pursuer a radiant smile and a friendly wave which was not returned.

Destamio's exultant travesty of a grin was replaced by a vindictive snarl. The barrel of an automatic appeared over the sill of his open window, and he steadied it with both hands to aim.

The Saint's smile also faded as he snatched the pistol from his belt and ducked to shelter as much of himself as possible below the dubious steel of the bus's coachwork. He had no misgivings as to who would be the victor in a straight shoot-out under those conditions; but when Destamio's henchmen chimed in, as they would without caring how many bystanders were killed or injured in the exchange, a lot of non-combatants were likely to become monuments to another of the perils of neutralism. And pusillanimous as they might have shown themselves, and perhaps undeserving of too much consideration, Simon had to think of the consequences to himself of a lucky score on the bus driver at that speed.

The problem was providentially resolved when Destamio suddenly disappeared. His startled face slid backwards with comical abruptness, taking the car with it, as if it had been snagged by some giant hook in the pavement; it took Simon an instant to realize that it was because the driver had been forced to jam on his brakes and drop back to avoid a head-on collision with oncoming traffic. No sooner had the sedan swung in behind the bus than an immense double-trailered truck roared by in the opposite direction, followed by a long straggle of weaving honking cars that had accumulated behind it.

The Saint didn't wait to see any more. His guardian angel was apparently trying to outdo himself, but there was no guarantee of how long that inordinate effort would continue. He had to make the most of it while it lasted—and before a break in the eastbound lane gave the Mafia chauffeur a chance to draw level again.

Through the broad windshield could be seen the outskirts of a city, and a cog-wheeled sign whipped by with its international invitation to visiting Rotarians, followed by the name CEFALU. Now he knew where he was, and it would do for another stage.

As he pushed towards the front again, and the door, one of the men in a seat behind the driver was leaning forward to mutter something in his ear, and the bus was slowing.

"There is no need to stop," Simon said clearly. "No one wants to get off yet."

He was in the right-hand front corner by then, one shoulder towards the windshield and the other towards the door, and the gun in his hand was for everyone to see but especially favored the driver.

"I am supposed to stop here," the man mumbled, his foot wavering between the accelerator and the brake.

"That stop has just been discontinued," said the Saint, and his forefinger moved ever so slightly on the trigger. "Keep going."

The bus rumbled on, and its other passengers glowered at the Saint sullenly, no longer trying to avoid his gaze, plainly resenting the danger that he had brought to them more violently and immediately than if he had been the carrier of a plague, but not knowing what to do about it. Simon remained impersonally alert and let his gun do all the threatening. Everyone received the message and declined to argue with it; the driver stared fixedly ahead and gripped the wheel as if it had been a wriggling snake.

From behind came repeated blares from the horn of the following sedan, and fresh sweat beaded the driver's already moist forehead. Through the length of the bus and over the heads of the other riders, Simon could catch glimpses of the sedan hanging on their tail and fretting for a chance to draw alongside again, but the increasing traffic of the town gave it no opening. And in the longitudinal direction, the passengers who were now crowded into the rear two-thirds of the bus could not open up a channel through which the Saint could be fired at from astern. Yet with all its advantages, it was a situation which could only be temporary: very soon, a traffic light or a traffic cop or some other hazard must intervene to change it, or the pursuing *mafiosi* would become more desperate and start shooting at the tires.

Simon decided that it was better to keep the initiative while he had it. He threw a long glance at the road ahead, then turned to wave the passengers back into submission before any of them could capitalize on his momentary inattention.

"Put your foot over the brake," he told the driver, "but do not touch it until I tell you to. Then give it all your weight—which can be alive or dead, as you prefer."

He had photographed the next quarter-mile of road on his memory, and now he waited for the first landmark he had picked to go by.

"Hold on tight, *amici*," he warned the passengers. "We are

going to make a sudden stop, and I do not want you to fall on your noses—or on this very hard piece of metal."

Again, through a momentary opening in the crowd, he glimpsed the trailing sedan edging out behind the left rear corner. And the wine-shop sign he had chosen for a marker was just ahead of the driver. The timing was perfect.

"*Ora!*" he yelled, and braced himself.

The brakes bit, and the bus slowed shudderingly. The standing passengers stumbled and collided and cursed, but miraculously held on to various props and managed to avoid being hurled down upon him in a human avalanche. And from the rear came a muted crash and crumpling sound, accompanied by a slight secondary jolt, which was the best of all he had hoped for.

The bus had scarcely even come to a complete standstill when he reached across the driver and in a swift motion turned off the ignition and removed the key.

"Anyone who gets out in less than two minutes will probably be shot," he announced, and pulled the lever that controlled the door next to him.

Then he was out, and one glance towards the rear confirmed that the Mafia sedan was now most satisfactorily welded to the back of the bus which it had been over-ambitiously trying to pass. Its doors were still shut, and the men in it, even if not seriously injured, were apparently still trying to pick themselves off the floor or otherwise pull themselves together. The car itself might or might not be out of the chase for a considerable time, but the bus solidly blocked any vehicular access to the alley across the entrance of which it had parked itself with a symmetry which the Saint could not have improved on if he had been driving it himself.

He had put the pistol back in his waistband under his shirt during the last second before he stepped out of the bus, so that there was nothing to make him noticeable except the fact that he was walking briskly away from the scene of an interesting accident instead of hurrying towards it like any normal native. But even so, those who passed him were probably too busy hustling to secure a front-row position in the gathering throng to pay any attention to his eccentric behavior.

He strode down the alley to where it crossed another even narrower passage, flipped a mental coin, and turned left. Half a block down on the right, a youth in a filthy apron was emptying a heaped pail of garbage into one of a group of overflowing cans, and went back through the bat-

tered door beside them, which emitted an almost palpable cloud of food and seasoning effluvia before it closed again. The Saint's nostrils twitched as he reached it: scent confirmed sight to justify the deduction that it was the back door of a restaurant, which had to have another more prepossessing entrance on the other side. Without hesitation he opened the door and found himself in a bustling steaming kitchen, and still without a pause he walked on through it, as if he owned the place or owned the proprietor, with a jaunty wave and an affable *"Ciao!"* to a slightly perplexed cook who was hooking yards of spaghetti from an enormous pot, heading for the next door through which he had seen a waiter pass. It took him straight into the restaurant, where other waiters and customers disinterestedly assumed that he must have had business in the kitchen or perhaps the men's room and hardly spared him a second look as he ambled purposefully but without unseemly haste through to the front entrance and the street beyond.

Three or four zigzagging blocks later he knew that Al Destamio and his personal goon squad would only pick up his trail again by accident. But that didn't mean he was home safe by any means. Unless they had all been knocked cold in the collision, which was unlikely, the Mafia knew now that he was in Cefalu, and the size of the town would not make it any less of a death trap than the last mountain village.

The only remedy was to leave it again as soon as possible.

He noted the names of the cross streets at the next intersection, then bought a guide book with a map of the town at a convenient newsstand. He quickly oriented himself and headed for the railroad station, hoping that he might catch a train there before the Ungodly reorganized and bethought them of the same move.

The station was swarming with a colorful and international jumble of tourists, besides the normal complement of more stolid population statistics going about their mundane business, and Simon merged himself with a boisterous group of French students who were heading for the platform entrance gates and a train that was just loading. He did not know its destination, but that was of secondary importance. It could only be Messina or Palermo, and either would do as long as he boarded unobserved. Fortune still seemed to be smoothing his way: the students were dressed very much like he was, and if necessary he could pass for French himself. Anyone who was not too sus-

picious could pass him over as their tutor or guide. Only a handful of *mafiosi* actually knew him by sight, and a mere verbal description would hardly be enough to single him out of the group he had joined. And the odds were encouragingly reasonable against the station being staked out by one of Destamio's hoods who had personally seen him before.

He had figured all that out to his own satisfaction just before he saw Lily standing by the barrier, at the same moment as she saw him.

In the fragment of a second between one step and the next, he marshalled and evaluated every possibility that could tie into her presence there, and went on to adumbrate what could follow or be filched from it. Coincidence he ruled out. Everything in her stance and positioning marked her as watching for somebody, and it was too great a stretch to imagine that that could be someone else. Although the Saint had been thinking automatically in terms of masculine malevolence, she was one of the very few in Destamio's immediate entourage who had been qualified to pick him out of any mob. But the sketchiest calculation showed that she could not possibly have been sent there since he abandoned the bus. She could only be part of the general net that had been spread around the area; but because she could positively identify him, she had been given one of the most strategic spots.

Simon Templar put down his other foot with a chilling respect for the murderous efficiency redemonstrated by the opposition, but knowing precisely how the score totalled at the instant that was tearing towards him, and what alternatives he could try to throw at it.

He continued to walk steadily towards her, as if they had even had a rendezvous, with a smile that not only did not falter but broadened as he came nearer.

"Well, well, well," he murmured, with the lilt in his voice which was always gayest when everything around was most grim. "How long can it be since we met? It seems like a million years!"

He took her firmly by both hands and gazed fondly into the gigantic opaque sunglasses trimmed with plastic flowers. He wondered what her eyes would be like when and if he ever saw them. Maybe she didn't have any. But at least the full red mouth was concealed only by lipstick. He kissed it for the second time, and it still tasted like warm paint.

"Don't scream, or try to pretend I'm insulting you," he said, without a change in his affectionate smile, "because if I had

to I could break your nose and knock all your front teeth out before anyone could possibly come to your rescue. And it'd be a shame for a pretty face like yours to be bashed in like the wings of an old jalopy."

He kept hold of her hands, just in case, but the resistance he felt was light and only momentary.

"Why?" she asked, in that voice that throbbed monosyllables like organ notes, and with as little individual expression.

"You mean you weren't waiting for me here?"

"Why should I?"

"Because Al sent you."

"Why?"

It was a perfect defense—in terms of the Maginot Line. He laughed.

"Don't tell me you've forgotten the last message I asked you to give him. You did deliver it, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know how Al is about these things. He's been trying to get even ever since. Didn't he tell you why he wanted you to put the finger on me?"

"No."

"You tripped, Lily," said the Saint quietly. "So you *are* here to point me out to the mob, and not just to see who else you could pick up in your new clothes."

In deference to the conventions of an ordinary Italian town, she was wearing a full wrap-around skirt that hid half the length of her sensational legs, but her upper structure was clearly limned by a sleeveless sweater that would have been barred at the doors of the Vatican.

"Where are the boys?" he asked, with an insistence that was outwardly emphasized only in the invisible tightening of his grip.

Her head moved a little as if she glanced around, but it was only an impression which could not be verified through those ornately floriferous blinders.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

Without letting go of her, as if it were only an unconscious waltz step in a lovers' tryst, he had edged around to reverse their positions, so that his back was to the railings; but he saw no indication of any *mafiosi* closing in or watching for a cue to do so. And he was becoming increasingly fascinated by the fact that she still made no attempt to scream for help, legitimate or illegitimate. His threat might have checked her in the beginning—long enough to let him improve his strategic position and maneuver her obstructively into the line of fire—but by now she should have been thinking of some counter to that. Unless her

mind was as completely barren as her dialog. . .

If there were any guns around, they must have been of very low caliber. But the wild idea grew stronger that there might not even be any. The railroad station at Cefalu was a way-out shot, a vague chance, the kind of improbable possibility that a doll might have been sent to cover, just for luck, but without giving her any heavy backing. It would be figured that if by some remote fluke he did show up there, she would be capable of latching on to him, overtly or covertly, until—

"We mustn't be seen here together," she said. "Can we go somewhere and talk?"

His hunch anchored itself solidly enough at that to provide a springboard for tentative exultation.

"Why not?" he said.

He turned her around and changed his grip more swiftly than she could have taken advantage of the instant's liberty. Now locking the fingers of her right hand in his left, with his arm inside hers holding it tight against his side, he steered her briskly towards the station exit, as firmly attached to him as if they had been Siamese twins. But she went along as obediently as a puppet; and if any of Destamio's men were waiting for a sign from her, they did not seem to get it.

He opened the door of the first cab on the rank outside, and followed her in without letting go her hand.

"I suppose you know this town," he said. "Where would be a safe place to go, where we won't be likely to run into Al or any of his pals?"

"The Hotel Baronale," she said at once, and Simon repeated it to the driver.

Obviously the Hotel Baronale was a prime place to avoid, but Simon waited till they had whipped around the next corner before he leaned forward and pushed a bill from his stolen roll over the driver's shoulder.

"I think my wife is having me followed," he said hoarsely. "Try to shake off anyone behind us. And instead of the Baronale, I think it would be safer to drop us at the Cathedral, if you understand."

"Do I understand?" said the chauffeur enthusiastically. "I have so much sympathy for you that it shames me to take your money."

Nevertheless, he succeeded in stifling his shame sufficiently to make the currency vanish as if it had been sucked up by a starving vacuum cleaner. But he also made a conscientious effort to earn it, with an inspired disregard for the recriminations of a few deluded souls who thought that even in Sicily there were

some traffic courtesies to be observed.

Looking back through the rear window, Simon became fairly satisfied that even if any second-team goons had been backing up Lily at the station, which seemed more unlikely every minute, they were now floundering in a subsiding wake.

"What are you so afraid of?" Lily asked, ingenuously.

"Mainly of being killed before I'm ready," said the Saint. "I suppose I'm a bit fussy; but since it's something you can only do once, I feel it should be done well. I've been working up to it for years, but I still think I need a few more rehearsals."

His flippancy bounced off her like a sandbag off a pillow.

"It can only be Fate, meeting you again like this," she said solemnly. "I never thought it would happen. I thought of you, but I didn't know where to find you."

It was a long speech for her, and he regarded her admiringly for having worked it out.

"Why were you thinking of me?" he inquired, resigning himself to playing it straight.

"I've left Al. When I found out how much he was mixed up in, I got scared."

"You didn't know this when you took up with him?"

"I haven't been with him as long as that. I'm a dancer. I was with a troupe doing a tour. I met him at a club in Naples, and he talked me into quitting. I liked him at first, and I wasn't getting on with the producer who booked the tour. Al took care of everything. But I didn't know what I was getting into."

In uttering so many sentences she was forced to give away clues to her mysterious accent; and with mild surprise he finally placed it as London-suburban cramped with some elocution-school affectations, and overlaid with a faint indefinable "foreign" intonation which she must have adopted for additional glamor.

"But if you've left Al, how did you get here to Cefalu?"

"I was afraid he'd catch me if I tried to get out of Italy by any of the ways he'd expect. You see, I took some money—I had to. I took the plane to Palermo and I thought I could take the next plane to London, but it was full up. There's only one a day. I was afraid to wait in Palermo, because Al has friends there, so I came here to wait till tomorrow."

The Saint had no way to know whether she was adlibbing or if her lines had been carefully taught her, but he nodded with the respectful gravity to which a good try was entitled.

"It's lucky that I ran into you," he said. "Luckier than you know, maybe. These men are dangerous!"

The cab shook as the driver spun it around another corner

and braked it to a squealing halt in front of the Cathedral. Simon tossed another bonus into his lap, with the generosity which is best indulged from some other rogue's misappropriated roll, and dragged Lily quickly out and across the fronting pavement.

"Why do you come here?" she protested, tottering to keep up with him on her high stiletto heels.

"Because all cathedrals have side doors. If cab-driver got inquisitive, he couldn't cover all of them; and if anyone asks him questions, he won't know which way we went after he dropped us."

Inside, he slowed to a more moderate pace, and he noticed that he no longer seemed to have any resistance to overcome. He surmised that now she was temporarily parted from any protective hoodlums who may have been posted in the vicinity of the station—or the Hotel Baronale—she must feel that her most vital interest was to stay close to him rather than escape from him, for if she lost track of him now she might be in the kind of trouble that it was painful even to imagine. He felt free enough to take out his guide book and turn the pages, making like any swivel-eyed tourist.

"The columns," he said, cribbing brazenly from the book; "take particular note of the columns, because they're the handsomest you are going to see in a long while. And those capitals! Byzantine, by golly, intermixed with Roman, and all of them standing foursquare holding up those stilted Gothic arches. Don't they *do* something to you? Or anything?"

"We can't stay here," Lily said, with a suppressed seethe. "If you're in trouble with Al, you must get out of town too."

"What do you suggest?"

"If you're afraid of the railway, there is a bus station—"

"I came here on a bus," he said, "and something happened that makes me feel that I'm probably *passeggero non grato* with the bus company."

"What, then?"

"I must think of you, Lily. I suppose you made a reservation on the plane to London tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Then you daren't go back to Palermo. By this time, Al could have checked with the airlines and found out about it. So we can fool him by going the opposite way, to Catania. We can get a plane from there to Malta —and that's British territory."

"How do we get there?"

"You don't feel like walking?"

She gazed at him in silent disgust.

"Maybe it is a bit far," he admitted. "But if we try to rent a car, that's the next thing the Ungodly will have thought of,

too. There must be something left that they won't think of—if I can only think of it. . ."

He riffled the pages of the guide book, fumbling for an inspiration somewhere in its recital of the antique grandeurs and modern comforts of the city. To lose themselves in a population of less than 12,000 was a very different problem from doing the same thing in New York or even Naples. But there had to be a solution, there always was.

And suddenly it was staring him in the face.

"I know," he said. "We'll go to the beach and cool off."

Lily's mouth opened in an expression not unlike that of a beached fish—an expression which the Saint had a fatal gift of provoking, and which always gave him a malicious satisfaction. With no intention of prematurely alleviating her bewilderment, he captured her hand again and led her down an aisle and out into a tree-shaded cloister. From there, a small gate let them out into what his map showed to be the Via Mandralisca, where he turned back in the direction of the sea.

Towing the baffled but obedient Lily beside him, he stopped at the first clothing store they came to and bought a knitted T-shirt in horizontal blue and white stripes and a pair of cheap sandals. He changed into them quickly in the next convenient alley, discarding his former soiled shirt and scuffed shoes in the nearest trash barrel. A little farther on, at a cubicle of tourist superfluities overflowing on to the sidewalk, he acquired a pair of sunglasses and a huge garish straw bag which he gave Lily to carry.

Only a block from the approaching vista of blue Mediterranean, he made a last stop at well-stocked *salumeria*, where an apparently unsuspicious proprietor was delighted to wrap bountiful packages of cheese, ham, sausage, artichoke hearts and ripe olives, together with a loaf of crusty bread and a flagon of the sturdy purple Corvo that would agreeably moisten their passage. These were all stowed in the capacious sack with which he had thoughtfully provided Lily.

"What is all this for?" she queried plaintively.

"For either of us who gets hungry. It might be late before we get a proper dinner."

None of the shopkeepers he had patronized seemed to have been alerted; or perhaps Destamio's grapevine had been too busy trying to block the more obvious exits, so far, to diffuse itself over the general prospect. At any rate, they reached the beach without any alarming signals registering on Simon Templar's ultrasensitive antennae, looking like any other tourist

couple among the clutter of humanity that was reclining or romping according to age and temperament.

Once among them, he made himself even more typical and less memorable by peeling off his T-shirt, putting it with the sandals in the catchall bag, and rolling his trousers up to the knee. His bronzed torso matched the most common tint of the other vacationers; and even if his musculature was considerably more striking than the average, it was not outstandingly different from that of any weight-lifting beach boy. There was nothing much else about him for anyone to notice or describe.

Lily was a little more difficult to camouflage, but he made her roll her sweater up above her midriff until it was almost a brassiere, and unbutton her skirt to bare the maximum length of thigh as she walked barefoot like himself, with her shoes joining the other discards in the big bag. She had already tied up her dazzlingly bleached hair in a scarf, at his suggestion, while he was changing his shirt.

So they completed their crossing of the beach as reasonable facsimiles of any two commonplace holiday-makers, hand in hand, to the water's edge where there were drawn up some of the Mediterranean's most popular pleasure craft, those companionable catamarans made just for a couple to sit in side by side and pedal themselves lazily around with the aid of the paddle-wheel housed between the pontoons. Practically, however, they can be propelled faster and much more effortlessly than the ordinary rowboat, and are far more seaworthy and comfortable in moderately messy weather; and in fact it was the guide-book's mention of this littoral attraction which had led him there.

The concessionaire came to meet them as they arrived, beaming with mercenary optimism.

"*Che bellissimo giorno, signore!* And a beautiful afternoon for a ride in a *moscone*. This is the best time of day!"

"It is late," Simon said dubiously. Any appearance of urgency or eagerness might kindle suspicion if there were already a spark for it to fan, and in any case would be sharply remembered later. "There will not be much more sun."

"It is only the middle of the afternoon!" protested the operator, waving his arms to the heavens for witness. "And when the sun is going down, it is nice and cool. Besides, I will make you a special price."

"How much?"

There followed the inevitable formality of bargaining, and a price was finally agreed on to cover the remaining duration of daylight. Simon paid it in advance.

"In case we are a little late," he said with an elaborate wink, "you will not have to wait for us."

The man grinned in broad fraternity.

"Capito! Grazie! E buona sorte!"

Simon handed Lily into her seat, and helped the proprietor push the paddle-cat into the water before he hopped nimbly aboard and took the tiller, turning their twin prows westward as he began to pedal in unison with her.

It was all he could do to refrain from laughing out loud. Behind him, the town would be swarming with Destamio's minions: he formed a whimsical picture of them pouring in from all directions until they outnumbered both natives and tourists. The railroad station was probably infested with them by now, and likewise the bus depot; unless Destamio's car had hit the bus harder than it sounded, he could have organized coverage of every outlying road and even footpath, and even the little port might not have been overlooked; but Simon was joyfully prepared to bet his life that he had hit on the one possible exit that a serious-minded creep like the former Dino Cartelli would never think of until it was too late. It had become a truly Saintly escape, outrageous in its originality—and now spiked with a bonus that he would not have tried to incorporate in his dizziest dream.

"Isn't Catania the other way?" she said after a while.

"You're brilliant," he assured her reverently. "This is the way to Palermo. The *moscone* merchant has to see us going this way. All the clues should keep pointing to Palermo. Only you and I know where we're really going."

When they were far enough out for their features not to be recognizable to the naked eye, but not so far that it would look as if they were setting out on a major voyage, he held a course parallel with the coast, searching the shore line for a special kind of topography that would lend itself to what he had in mind. It was not too long before he found it: a tiny cove floored with a half-moon of sand, not much wider than the length of a *moscone,* walled around with sheer cliffs rising twenty feet or more, and flanked by massive falls of rock so as to be almost inaccessible except from the sea. It was at least a mile from the nearest public beach.

Simon steered towards it, appreciating its advantages more and more as it came closer, and kept on pedalling until the pontoons grounded gently on the sand. He jumped off and held Lily's hand to balance her as she walked along a pontoon to step

off daintily without wetting her feet; then he hauled the boat higher to secure it from being dislodged by the gently lapping wavelets, off-loaded the bulging bag, and sat down with it above the high-water mark.

Lily stared down at him in blank befuddlement.

"You're not going to stay here?"

"Only until after sunset. Then we can double back past Cefalu again and keep heading towards Catania. We'll pedal far enough to get well outside any cordon that Al may have thrown around here, and slip ashore somewhere in the dark." He patted the sand beside him invitingly. "Meanwhile, it's nice and shady here, and we've got everything we need to ward off death by thirst or starvation. Why not enjoy it?"

She sat down, slowly, while the Saint uncorked the wine, which he had kept well wrapped in the bottom of the bag for insulation from the sun and warmth, and poured some into the small plastic tumblers which the *negoziante* had efficiently added to his bill.

"I guess we're in this together now, Lily," said the Saint. "I'll get us out of it, though. Just stick with me. I can't help feeling responsible, in a way, for the trouble between you and Al, but I'll try to make up for it."

She gave him a long impenetrable scrutiny in which he could feel wheels revolving as in a primitive adding machine. There was only one arithmetical conclusion that they could reach, but the fringe benefits could transcend the limitations of mechanical bookkeeping.

He waited patiently.

"To hell with Al," she said finally. "I like you much better, anyway."

After the warm paint was washed off with enough food and wine, there was nothing wrong with her lips at all.

When the brief twilight had turned to dark, the Saint stood up and dusted off his pants.

"All good things come to an end," he said sadly. "It's been wonderful, but I've got to be moving on."

It had become cool enough, when he was away from her, for him to be glad to put on his T-shirt again, while she rearranged the scarf over her hair. He also took his sandals out of the bag and carried them to the *moscone*, where he put them on the bench between the seats. Then he lifted the forward end of the nearest pontoon and pushed until the craft was well afloat again.

Lily came down to the edge of the water, carrying the bag.

"Just a minute," he said smoothly.

She stood still, while he climbed aboard and settled in

the starboard seat. He put his feet on the pedals and took a tentative turn backwards, making sure that his weight hadn't taken the shallow draft down to the sand again.

"I hate to do this, Lily," he said, "but I'm not taking you any farther. If you get chilly, pile some sand on yourself—it'll keep you warm. There'll be plenty of boats around in the morning that you can hail. I wouldn't try to scramble out over the rocks tonight—you don't have the right shoes for it, and in the dark you'd be likely to break a leg."

"You're crazy," she gasped.

"That has been suggested before," he admitted. "And some people have thought I'd fall for the goofiest stories. But your yarn about how you got to Cefalu and just happened to be loafing around the station was stretching the long arm of coincidence right out of its socket, even for me. I only went along with the gag because I didn't have any choice. But I still say thanks, because it helped me out of a tough spot."

If he needed any confirmation of his analysis, he had it in the name she called him, which cannot be quoted here, in deference to the more elderly readers of these chronicles.

"You're a naughty girl, Lily," he said reproachfully. "You didn't see anything wrong with trying to finger me for the Mafia, and you'd have been just as ready to do it in Catania, and turn your back while they mowed me down. If you want to play Mata Hari, you should be a good sport about losing your bait."

Sometime about sunset he had taken off her glasses, and verified that she actually had eyes—smoky gray ones, which by then were deliciously sleepy. Now he could no longer distinguish them in the gloom; which made liars of a whole school of authors, who he was certain would have described them as spattering sparks and flame.

She kept coming forward, regardless now of splashing into the sea over her ankles and then to the depth of her streamlined calves; and he prudently backpedalled enough to keep the *moscone* always retreating beyond her reach.

"It's an awful long swim back," he cautioned her, "unless you're in the Channel-crossing class. And nasty things come out in these waters at night, like slimy eels with sharp teeth. It's not worth it, honestly. I'm sure Al will understand."

She stopped with the water up to her knees, screaming abuse with an imaginative fluency that was in startling contrast to her usual inarticulateness, while he backed up with increasing acceleration until he had put

enough distance between them to be able to come forward again in a long turn past the cove and outwards.

"Don't spoil the memory, Lily," he pleaded as he went by. "I said thank you, didn't I?"

It was a wasted effort. Her invective followed him as far as her voice would carry, and made him wonder how a nice girl could have picked up that vocabulary.

He kept pointing towards the Pole Star until the shrieks faded astern, and then made a slow turn to the left.

Westwards. Towards Palermo. Not Catania.

It was an especially snide trick to add to the wrongs he had done Lily, after she had given so much to the Mafia cause, but he couldn't afford to be sentimental. Whenever she was rescued or made her own way to a telephone, she would swear that the Saint was making for Catania. And that could make all the difference to his first hours in Palermo.

His legs pumped steadily, at a rate which he could keep up for hours and yet which pushed the *moscone* along at its maximum hull speed, beyond which any extra effort would have achieved nothing but churning water. Nevertheless this terminal velocity was not inconsiderable, so far as he could judge from his impression of the inky water slipping past, for a vessel that wasn't designed for racing and relied only on muscular propulsion.

The slight evening breeze had dropped and the sea was practically dead calm. It was easy to navigate basically by keeping Polaris over his right shoulder. The twinkling illumination of small settlements on the coast, and occasional flashes of headlights on the highway, located the shore line; and he kept far enough from it to feel secure from accidental discovery by any headlights that might be turned capriciously out to sea.

Eventually, of course, when he figured that he had put enough miles behind him, he had to edge shorewards again. He had heard one train rumbling along the coastal track, and thought he had identified its cyclopean headlamp flashing between cuttings and embankments; he had to hope that the next one would not pass too soon, or be too far behind. He would be afraid to risk another bus, because the driver by that time might have heard of the adventure of another bus driver and be abnormally observant of all passengers; but a long wait at a train stop also had its hazards.

He made his final approach along a fair stretch of dark coast preceding the lights of another town, nursing the little waterbug until the dim starlight found

him a sheltered beach to run up on. He hauled the boat well up above the tide line, where it would be safe until the indignant owner could locate it, and stumbled over some rocks and through a stony patch of some unrecognizable cultivation to a road which led into the hardly less murky outskirts of the community.

The sign on the railroad station, which he located simply by turning inland until the tracks stopped him, and then following them, read CAMPOFELICE DI ROCCELLA; and the waiting room was deserted. Simon strolled in, studied the timetable on the wall, and purchased a ticket to Palermo. The next train was due in only ten minutes; and precisely on schedule it pulled in, hissed its brakes, discharged a handful of passengers, and clankingly pulled out again—a performance for which a certain Benito Mussolini once claimed all the credit.

There were only a few drowsy *contadini* and a couple of chattering families of sun-drenched sightseers aboard, and none of them paid any attention to the Saint during the hour's ride into Palermo.

Disembarking there was a fairly tense moment. He was not seriously expecting a *mafiosa* delegation of welcome, but the penalties of excessive optimism could be too drastic to be taken lightly. He stayed close to the tourist families, using the same technique that he had tried with the students at Cefalu, and hoping that anyone who had only a description to go by would dismiss him as one of their party. But his far-ranging gaze picked out no greeters or loiterers with the malevolent aspect of Destamio's goondoliers. The hue and cry was still far behind, apparently—and hopefully pointing in other directions.

Outside the station, he let himself be guided by the brighter lights and the busier flow of people, in order to melt as far as possible into the anonymous multitude, until the current drifted him by the kind of nook that he wanted to be washed into.

This was a small but cheerfully sparkling trattoria which provided him with a half-litre of wine and the small change for a phone call. He rang the number that Marco Ponti had given him, and knew that the cards were still running for him when the detective's own crisp voice answered the buzz, even though it sounded tense and edgy.

"Pronto! Con chi parlo?"

"An old friend," said the Saint, in Italian, "who has some interesting news about some older friends of yours."

The phone booth is a refinement which has made little progress in Sicily, and he was

well aware of the automatic neighborly interest of the *padrone* and any unoccupied customer within earshot. Even to have spoken a word of English would have aroused a curiosity which could ultimately have been fatal.

"Saint!" the earpiece rasped loudly. "What happened to you? Where are you? I was afraid you were dead. An impossibly large Bugatti was reported abandoned in the country, and was towed in here to the police garage. By a lucky accident I took the job of tracing the owner—who told me that *you* had hired it, and . . . Wait, what did you say about friends of ours? Do you mean—"

"I do. The ones we are both so fond of. But tell me first, where is the car now?"

"The owner came to the *questura* with an extra set of keys and wanted to take it away with him, but I did not want to release it until I found out what had happened to you, in case it should be examined for clues, so I had it impounded."

"Good! I was going to tell you to grab a taxi and join me, but the Bugatti might be more useful. I have a lot of news about our friends which would take too long to give you over the phone. So why not un-impound the Bug and drive it here? I am in a restaurant named *Da Gemma,* somewhere near the station—you probably know it. The food smells are making my mouth water, so I shall order something while I wait. But hurry, because I think we have a busy night coming up."

The only answer was an energized click at the other end of the line; and the Saint grinned and returned to his table and an assay of the menu for some sustaining snack. Enough time and exercise had intervened since his picnic with Lily to create a fresh appetite; and fortunately, late as it was getting by northern standards, it was not at all an exceptional hour for supper in the meridional tradition.

He was chasing the last juicy morsels of a tasty *lepre in salmi* around his plate with a crust of bread when he heard the reverberant gurgle of an unmistakable exhaust outside, and Ponti burst through the pendant strips of plastic that curtained the door. Simon waved him to the place on the other side of the table, where a clean glass and a fresh carafe of wine had already been set up.

"I did not come here to get drunk with you," the detective said, pouring himself a glass and draining half of it. "Be quick and tell me what has happened."

"Among other things, I have been conked on the head, kidnaped, shot at, and chased all over by an assortment of bandits who must have a real grudge

against your Chamber of Commerce. But I suppose it would bore you to hear all my private misadventures. The part that I know will interest you involves the location of a *castello* where you can find, if you move quickly enough, a beautiful sampling of the directors of that Company in full session, along with the chairman of the board himself, whose name seems to be Pasquale."

Although they were talking in low voices that could hardly have carried to the nearest occupied table, it still seemed circumspect to make certain references only obliquely.

"I know all about that meeting," Ponti said. "Everything, that is, except the location. Where is it?"

"I wouldn't know how to give you the address, but I could take you there." Simon refilled their glasses. "But you surprise me—you seem to know a lot more about this organization than you did the last time we talked."

"I should claim to have done some extraordinary secret research, but I am too modest. I owe it all to the sample of their products that was left in your car, the one that was designed to make the loud noise. You remember, there was a certain kind of signature on the plastic. I photographed it myself, and checked it against the identification files while the clerk was at lunch. The fates smiled, for a change, and I discovered that the marks were made by a local dealer named Niccolo who has been accused of handling similar goods before, but of course was absolved for lack of evidence. I brought him in to the office myself and managed to question him privately."

"But I thought those people would never tell anything. The *omertà,* and all that. You yourself told me they would die before they talked."

"That is the rule. But it has been broken, usually by women. In 1955, one Francesca Serio denounced four of these salesmen for putting her son out of business—permanently. They were sent to prison for life. In 1962 another, Rosa Riccobono, who lost her husband and three sons to a vendetta with the same Company, gave us a list of more than 29 who were charged with controlling the business in her village. These women defied the penalty because of love, or grief. With Niccolo, I used another argument. An inspiration."

"Worse than death?"

"For him. And more permanent than torture."

"Do tell."

"I put a white coat on the old man who sweeps the building—a very distinguished old fellow, but weak in the head—and laid out a row of butcher knives, and one of the masks that are kept for tear gas. I told Niccolo that we were going to anesthetize

him, very humanely, but unless he talked"—Ponti leaned forward and dropped his voice even lower, almost to a sepulchral depth—"he would wake up and find he had been castrated."

Simon regarded him with unstinted admiration.

"I felt there was a spark of genius in you, from our first meeting," he said sincerely. "So Niccolo talked."

"It is apparently common gossip throughout the organization that Don Pasquale's health will soon force him to retire. And when the chairman is on his way out, the other Directors gather to compete for the succession. In such a crisis, an organization becomes a little disorganized, and the opposition has a chance to compete against weakness. All I needed was to know the meeting place. If you know it, we can proceed. Shall we go?"

The detective's quietly controlled voice was a contrast to the creased urgency of his earnest old-young face. The Saint started to raise a quizzical eyebrow, and left it only half lifted.

"Whatever you say, Marco," he acquiesced, and looked around for a waiter and a bill.

In a few minutes they were outside, where the gleaming masterpiece of Ettore waited at the curb; but as Simon instinctively aimed himself towards the driver's seat, Ponti contrived to interpose himself quite inoffensively.

"You will allow me? It will be easier, since I know the way."

"To where?"

"What I learned from Niccolo was interesting enough for me to send a prepared message to Rome, which has resulted in a picked company of *bersaglieri* being flown into Sicily. I wanted to have some reliable help on hand whenever I completed the information I needed to use them. You are about to do that."

"Then I'm the one who knows the way."

"Not to where the troops are."

Simon nodded and went around the front of the car to crank it. It started as it had before, at the first turn of the handle, with an instancy which made electric starters seem like effete fripperies; and the Saint got in to the passenger seat.

"Do you intend to leave the police out of this altogether?" he asked, as they thundered away.

"I am the police," Ponti said. "But I do not know which others I can trust. If I tried to work through them there would be delays, confusions, and slow mobilization. By the time we got to this *castello* it would be empty. I knew this before I ever came to Sicily, and arrangements were made in Rome to have these soldiers prepared for an 'emergency maneuver' whenever I might need them."

"And you know that they are reliable?"

"Completely. Only their commander knows their mission here, but his men are absolutely loyal to him and would follow him into hell on skis if he ordered it. As far as we can tell they have not been penetrated by the Mafia, so they should look forward to the fun of roughing up these *canaglie*. Now tell me everything you have been doing."

Ponti himself was no slowpoke at the wheel, it turned out, and he spurred the giant Bugatti along at a gait which would have had many passengers straining on imaginary brakes and muttering silent prayers; but the Saint was fatalistic or iron-nerved enough to tell his story without faltering or losing the thread of it. The only things he left out were certain personal details which he did not think should concern Ponti or affect his official actions.

"So," he concluded, "they should still think they have me cordoned in at Cefalu, and even when they hear from Lily they should believe I'm making for Catania. Anyhow they ought not to have felt that they have to vacate their headquarters in a hurry. They think I'm on the run and busy trying to save my own skin. And Al would never expect me to be talking to you like this."

"I have tried not to allow that impression," Ponti said, "by putting out an order that I want you for personal questioning about a political conspiracy. I did that partly to try to find some trace of you, of course, and to make sure that if you were picked up you would not be beaten up by some stupid cop who would take you for a common criminal. I have found that when any political implications are mentioned, the police are inclined to proceed with caution."

"When I think of some of my celebrated rude remarks about policemen," said the Saint, "your thoughtfulness brings a lump to my throat. And no one would dream you had an ulterior motive."

"I have only one motive—to show these *fannuloni* that they are not bigger than the law. And here we have the means to do it."

The treacherous mountain road over which they had last been bouncing ended at a gap in a wire fence guarded by a sentry with rifle and bayonet. As he barred the way, a young officer appeared out of the darkness and saluted when Ponti gave his name.

"*Il maggiore L'aspetta,*" he said. "Leave your car over here."

There was no illumination

other than the lamp over the gate and their own headlights, and when the latter were switched off they stumbled through rutted dirt until a vague hut shape loomed up before them. A door opened and a white wedge of light poured out; then they were inside the bare wooden building.

"Ponti," said an older officer in an unbuttoned field tunic, grasping the detective's hand, "it is good to know we shall have some action. Everything is ready. When shall we move?"

"At once. This is Signor Templar, who knows the location of our objective. Major Olivetti."

The commandant turned to Simon and acknowledged the introduction with a crunching grip. The top of his bald head hardly came to the Saint's chin; but there was nothing small about him. He had a chest like a barrel and arms like tree-trunks. The right side of his face was a webwork of scars that stood out clearly on his swarthy skin, and a black patch covered that eye, which would have given him a highly sinister appearance but for the merry twinkle in the other.

"*Piacere!* I have heard of you, Signor Templar, and I am glad to have you on our side. Over here I have maps of all Sicily, on the largest scale. Can you show me on them where we have to go?"

"I think so," said the Saint, and bent over the table.

The lieutenant who had brought them from the gate, together with another lieutenant and a sergeant who were already in the hut, joined Olivetti and Ponti around the map and watched intently while Simon traced his way over the contours from the junction on the coast where he had caught the bus to Cefalu, back up the dry river bed to the village and up over the mountain range to the other valley and the combination of remembered landmarks which enabled him to pinpoint the site of the eyrie from which he had escaped.

"This road is unpaved," he said, running a fingernail along the route down from the house. "I haven't been on this upper stretch, but their car came down it at speed with no trouble. I don't know anything about this other road marked along the top of the cliff."

Olivetti studied the terrain with professional minuteness.

"On either road, there is a risk that they may have outposts who would give warning of the approach of a force like ours. You mentioned descending this cliff in the dark. Could we send men up that way?"

"Even Alpine troops, I think, would need pitons, and the hammering would make too much noise. I came down that way

because I had to, and some of it was just dropping and sliding and hoping for the best."

"I could deploy my men from these points and let them make it on foot, but then I could not guarantee they would be ready to close in before dawn."

"I know there is no logical reason why this convocation should panic and pack up in the middle of the night," Ponti said, "but I must admit that each hour we leave the trap open will make me more afraid of finding it empty when we close it."

"May I make a suggestion?" asked the Saint.

"Of course. You are the only one of us who has already seen this area in daylight."

"And I think it would be a commando's nightmare. On the other hand, if you got there and found that the birds had flown, I should feel sillier than anyone. So I think we should try for speed rather than stealth. Of course, I would try to cut all the telephone lines in the area —and apologize to the telephone company afterwards, otherwise some Mafia sympathizer among the operators would certainly send out a warning. But after that, I would move in as fast as possible, and hang the uproar. I take it your company is mechanized, *maggiore?*"

"*Si.* That is, we have no tanks, but we have trucks and troop carriers."

Simon pointed to the two roads to the Mafia hideout.

"Then if you split them into two units, and send one up by this road and one by this, timed to meet at the top——once they start, they themselves will be blocking the only roads that the mobsters could escape by, if they still *are* up there. However, if they find themselves cornered like that, the jokers might decide to fight rather than surrender. Are you prepared to go as far as a shooting war?"

"I should welcome it!" Olivetti bellowed, and struck the flimsy trestle table a great blow with his fist that threatened the support of its legs. "If Ponti has the authority—"

"That is quite a point," Simon admitted, turning to the detective. "Can you justify launching an offensive like this?"

Ponti showed his teeth in a vulpine grin.

"I can if you are not deceiving me, and unless you let me down. In which case I would do worse to you than I promised Niccolo. But on your testimony I have plenty to charge them with—assault, kidnaping, attempted murder. Then there is a very legalistic charge involving criminal intentions, which an assembly of persons of bad repute can be assumed to be plotting, in certain circumstances. But best of all would be if one of them does fire a shot at us—then we

need no more excuses."

"So, it is decided," Olivetti said, with ebullient enthusiasm. "The *tecnici* will go out first, in pairs, on motorcycles. Then, look, the first and second *plotoni*—"

His subalterns and the sergeant crowded up to follow his pointings on the map as he developed the plan in greater detail; and Ponti caught Simon's eye and beckoned him away from the briefing.

"I imagine you would like to go back to your hotel and get some sleep, but that might be dangerous. Let me give you the key to my apartment. The Mafia will never look for you there. I will see you there after all this is over. You will have to identify the ones that we capture, and make a deposition to support the charges. The address is—"

Simon had already begun to shake his head, before he interrupted.

"There you go again, Marco, trying to kill me with kindness," he murmured. "It makes me feel an ungrateful bum to turn you down, but I have sat through too many acts of this opera to be eased out before the grand finale. I shall come along and be ready with more of my brilliant advice in case the military needs it."

"But you are a civilian. You do not need to expose yourself—"

"Someone should have told me that a few days ago. But now I still have those personal problems of my own which you know something about, and I want a chance to straighten them out before some trigger-happy *bersagliere* blasts away any hope of getting the answers. If you refuse me that little bit of fun, I might be so upset as to get an attack of amnesia, and be completely unable to identify any of your prisoners. Such things can happen to hysterical types like me."

Ponti's lips tightened.

"Your blackmail is shameful. But I am forced to bow to it. However, I take no responsibility for your safety, or for any legal trouble you may get into."

"You never did, did you?" said the Saint innocently.

The map-table conference broke up, and the lieutenants and the sergeant hurried out.

"Well, the operation will be rolling in eight minutes," Olivetti said. "The Company was put on full alert as soon as you telephoned, Ponti—and since then there has been no telephoning."

With a broad smile, he held up his huge hand and clicked a pantomime wire-cutter.

"I, too, take no chances," he said, and looked at the Saint. "I am glad you are going with us. It will help to have someone who knows the layout of this *castello*."

"He insists," Ponti said wryly.

"He is afraid that he may become hysterical if he is left alone. He has been through a lot, you know."

"Now you try to explain that, Marco," Simon grinned, and went out.

He was checking the gas and oil in the Bugatti when the advance scouts set out, the wasp-whine of the Guzzi motorcycles splitting the still night. They were followed by the snore of truck engines grumbling into life.

Satisfied that his borrowed behemoth was still fuelled for any kilometrage that it was likely to be called on to cover, he was buckling down the hood when a Fiat scout car skidded to a stop beside him with all four wheels locked. Major Olivetti was at the wheel. In the rear seat, a lieutenant and the radio-man braced themselves stoically, being no doubt inured to their commander's mercurial pilotage; but in the other front bucket Ponti had his hands clamped to the dashboard with a pained expression which hinted that he might have preferred the vehicle which had brought him to the camp.

"Follow my column," Olivetti bawled, "and join me when we stop. Do you want a gun?

He proffered his own automatic.

"Thank you; but it must be illegal for foreign civilians in this country to possess military firearms. And in any case I already have an illegal weapon obtained from the Mafia. But don't tell your *polizziotti* friends."

Ponti opened his mouth, but whatever contribution he may have had in mind was not forthcoming, at least in Simon's hearing. For at that moment the grinning major snapped in the clutch, and the scout car vanished into the night with a jolt that could have whiplashed the necks of its occupants.

A column of trucks growled after it while Simon was winding up the Bugatti and turning it around. He fell in after the scout car that brought up the rear.

Strangely or naturally, according to which school of psychology you favor, he was not wondering how Lily was making out, but what had happened to Gina. Gina with the dark virginal eyes and the wickedly nymphic body and the young eagerness and unsureness, who was another part of the intricate house of Destamio, and who could be destroyed with it —if it had not already destroyed her first . . .

NEXT MONTH

THE THRILLING CLIMAX

of **Vendetta for the Saint!**

mercy killing

by Miriam Allen deFord

A TRUE MARRIAGE is not simply the relationship of a man and a woman. It can become almost an entity in itself, made up of sex-attraction, deep friendship, like-mindedness, mutual aid, and interdependence. Such marriages are rare. James and Florence Warden had lived for twenty-nine years in that kind of union, which had survived depression, war, and the strains and misunderstandings inevitable in any close association of two human beings.

They were no longer young, and they never had been especially handsome or brilliant. Both were essentially shy, introverted persons, who had been very lonely until they found each other when both of them were already nearly thirty. They had their own work and outside interests — James was a government economist, and was good enough at chess to play in tournaments with the great; Florence did exquisite bookbinding which made its way into many museums and into the hands of a few wealthy private collectors, and for three days a week she was a Grey Lady at the local

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Miriam Allen deFord, a frequent contributor to this magazine, is the author of several works including the award-winning THE OVERBURY AFFAIR (Chilton) and STONE WALLS (Chilton, 1962), a history of the evolution of prison reform from its effective start in the eighteenth century. Here, though, she deals with an issue as old as time itself. . . .

Red Cross blood bank — but they had little social life, and the basic thing to each of them was the companionship of the other. There was nobody else they really needed in their lives. Their only child had died in infancy.

Suddenly Florence began to lose weight alarmingly. She developed a constant cough, and every effort tired her. She pooh-poohed James's insistance that she see a doctor, though she did take a leave of absence from the Grey Ladies. When, finally, she spat blood, she still made light of it, but to please James she made an appointment with an internist who had been recommended to him; neither of them had ever been seriously ill.

The internist turned her over to a surgeon; and within a week she found herself on the table for an exploratory operation. The surgeon sewed up the incision he had made and sent her back to her bed in the hospital. James, white and trembling, was called to his office.

"I want you to tell me the exact truth," he begged, holding his voice steady.

The surgeon's eyes were compassionate.

"The malignancy has spread everywhere from the lungs," he said. "Metastisis is advanced. The case is inoperable."

"Have you told her?"

"Of course not; we never tell the patient, and I advise you not to do so, either."

"I shall have to, if she asks," said James. "We have never told a lie to each other."

She did ask, of course, soon after she came home from the hospital. He looked away from her when he told her, but she only lay quietly with no expression on her face. Then she asked, "How long have I?"

"He can't prophesy; it might be a year, it might be less, it might be more."

"And how long can I be up and about and do my work?" How long before the pain begins?"

"Nobody can say that."

"I'll live a normal life as long as possible," she announced determinedly. "I'll get as much out of life as I can, as long as I can, and then we'll face this thing together, the way we've faced everything."

She reached out a hand and gripped his hard.

"I promise you one thing, darling," she said firmly. "I'll never take my own life; you never need to be afraid of that. He'll give me drugs if it gets too bad — they make things much easier now than they used to be."

It was six months before the pain grew severe, six months when sometimes James almost forgot the sword hanging over their heads. Florence did not go back to the blood bank, but she

worked harder than before at her bookbinding, as if wanting to express as much as possible of the beauty born of her brain and hands while her body would let her. She cared for their home as usual, except that a woman came in twice a week now to do the heavy labor.

She even insisted on his going to a chess tournament which he had planned for a year to attend. He was away for three days. He had never played so well; he almost beat the national champion. Florence listened eagerly to his description, play by play. At the end he looked imploringly at her, a twisted smile on his lips, and said, "Don't ever make me go away from you again."

After that he never left her except for his daily office hours. There was no option about that, if Florence were to be cared for on a research economist's salary.

The time of the sedatives began. For a long while Florence was lucky; she hardly ever had a hard spasm of pain while James was there to see, and she learned to hide most of her agony from his eyes. The drugs grew stronger, until the limit of tolerance had been reached, and the agony outmaneuvered them. James rang up the doctor, and went to see him in his lunch hour.

"You'd shoot a dog or a horse," he said roughly. "Why do you let her suffer?"

The doctor looked at him pityingly.

"You know the answer. Physicians are sworn to save life, not to end it." He had seen too many in James Warden's state. His voice grew stern. "It is not my right, or yours, or anybody's, to make ourselves arbiters of life or death. That is the law, if it isn't your morality. Your wife would rather endure anything — anybody would — than contemplate your being tried for her murder. I want you to give me your solemn word, as you love your wife, that if you have had any such thought you will put it out of your mind forever."

"Isn't there anything at all you can do to help? The drugs she is taking are no better than water now."

"There is frontal lobotomy, and there is this new cauterization of brain tissues they are trying. They can't arrest or slow the disease, but they can lessen the pain, perhaps remove it entirely. Talk it over with your wife. It had got beyond X-rays or radium long before I saw her."

But Florence refused.

"As long as I'm here I want to be *myself*, the self you know and love," she said resolutely. "I don't want to be turned into an automaton, or into a child or a half-wit. I'd rather undergo anything than that."

She was bedridden now most of the time. She could hardly

ever work, even for a few minutes, at her bookbinding, but she insisted on having her materials and tools always ready on the table by her bed. She wanted terribly to finish what would be her last masterpiece — a lovely thing in dark purple leather, with intricate arabesques of stylized grapes and grape-leaves.

It had come at last to the point where she must not be left alone at all. It was more necessary than ever for James to keep on working, for he must pay for the nurse who came every morning and stayed till he got home. Florence spoke tentatively about a night nurse too.

"Not yet," he besought. "Not until you must have skilled care every minute. I want to be the one to look after you as long as I can."

"But you're not getting enough sleep — you'll make yourself ill."

"I'm getting all the sleep I need; I'm perfectly well," he said obstinately. "All I'm living for now — " he paused, to keep his voice from breaking — "is the hours alone together we have left."

His daily work did not suffer; something in his mind took over and did it automatically for him, just as it had played chess for him at the tournament. But when he glanced in the mirror as he shaved he could see the new grey hairs, the new lines on his colorless skin. He went to see the doctor again.

"How much longer?" he asked, his face ashen.

"She's amazingly strong," the doctor answered. "Her heart and her arteries are those of a woman twenty years younger. I can't give you any estimate that would mean a thing. This stage might last as long as any of the others; it might last longer."

"I see."

"You remember your promise to me, Mr. Warden?" the doctor said harshly.

"I remember."

He sat by Florence's bed, late in the evening. Another month had passed. Her mind was as clear as ever; they spoke together once in a while of the things that had always been part of their world — of books and music and politics. Florence's voice stopped in the midst of a sentence. He looked at her: her fists were clenched, her teeth dug into her lower lip, sweat stood on her forehead. It was no use — for all her resistance a moan escaped her. Her whole body writhed in the grip of atrocious torment.

His mind whirling, James jumped to his feet and on shaking legs reached the table and picked up the hypodermic syringe. She managed to force a few words out of her strangled throat.

"No — no more — I've had all I'm allowed today," she gasped.

He hesitated, and then, beaten, he laid the syringe down again. His eyes fastened as if hypnotized on the array of sharp tools and knives still lying beside the purple leather at Florence's right hand, sharing the table now with medicines and the accessories of the sickroom.

And then suddenly he broke — he, whose will to hide his anguish had been as strong for her sake as hers had been for his. Sobbing aloud like a small child, tears streaming down his face, he groped his way blindly to her, and laid his grey head down beside hers. Half-lying, half-kneeling, he clung to her while the sobs shook his body and took his breath.

White and clammy in the first relief from the convulsion of pain, Florence turned to gaze at the face so near to hers. It was a haggard, ravaged face now, the face of a very old man. She loved it beyond anything on earth. And he, his sobs quieting at last, gazed back at her. She too was worn and old from pain and sorrow, and she was inexpressibly dear.

A hand reached out and made a quick decisive motion.

The nurse let herself in early the next morning and went straight to the bedroom. She stood rigid in the doorway, paralyzed by shock and horror.

There they lay together, the living and the dead: the living motionless, with eyes closed and slow shuddering breath, the dead with peace on the white thin face, the sharp bookbinder's knife lying soaked in blood beside the jagged wound in the temple.

The living eyes opened, tortured but blankly sane.

"Call the police," said Florence Warden calmly. "I couldn't bear it any more to see him suffer so dreadfully."

NEXT MONTH

SIMON TEMPLAR JOINS IN THE RAID ON MAFIA HEADQUARTERS AND THEN CONTINUES TO HUNT AL DESTAMIO UNTIL, AT LONG LAST, IT IS TIME TO CALL A HALT TO

Vendetta for the Saint

the golden bird of mallory

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

SLANE, for once in his life, was conscious of a slight breach of good manners as, from the windows of his comfortable sitting-room, he stared with undisguised curiosity at his approaching visitors.

They had arrived in some sort of antiquated vehicle, which would have been called a *barouche* in olden days, and a footman in dingy livery but with a cockade in his hat, who had obviously alighted to open the gate, was standing to attention upon the pavement. The leader of the little party of three was an elderly lady, stiff and upright as a dart. She was dressed, as was the companion following her, in almost flamboyant contempt of the fashions of the day. She wore a high turban hat of black velvet, to which was attached a sweeping veil, a black silk mantilla, and a black skirt which, reaching to the ground, conveyed more than a suggestion of the old Victorian type of hoop.

The lady following her was

In these days when we are still so close to what happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963, and to the apparent breakdown in morality and standards testified to by men such as Joseph Valachi and others, there are no doubt many who will dismiss E. P. Oppenheim, admittedly the chronicler of the mores of the privileged minority of another generation, as exotic and unreal—confronted as we are by tonight's headlines. This is of course nonsense. Men such as Slane, are equally a part of our own memories.

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apparently of about the same age and was dressed in precisely the same fashion.

Bringing up the rear was a girl between eighteen and twenty years of age, dressed with extreme simplicity, also in black, but, except with regard to the length of her skirt, which almost touched her ankles, in some accordance with modern fashions.

The door-bell rang, and Slane withdrew hastily into the obscurity of the room.

In a moment or two Parkins appeared, ushering in the trio. He seemed a little flustered.

"The Ladies Henrietta and Susannah St. Mallory, and Miss St. Mallory," he announced.

Slane bowed. It was apparently all he was expected to do. He indicated chairs with some ceremony, and the two elder ladies seated themselves. The girl roamed about. Parkins, with one more amazed glance over his shoulder, quitted the room.

The lady who had first entered opened the conversation:

"You have doubtless heard of our projected visit from Mr. Codrington."

"Mr. Codrington promised to write yesterday," the other sister murmured.

"I—as a matter of fact I have not heard," Slane confessed. "Will you excuse me one moment? The afternoon post is on the table. I was just about to open my letters."

He turned over the envelopes until he came to one on the back of which was embossed the name of a firm of solicitors of which Mr. Codrington was the senior partner.

"The letter has only just arrived," he explained. "You will permit me?"

The ladies gave assent. Slane cut open the envelope, and read the few lines hastily:

"My dear Slane,

Whether you will ever forgive me or not, I do not know. Perhaps if your sense of humour is strong enough you will even bless my name. The fact remains that I have sent you a couple of clients. What they want I do not know. They refused to confide in me.

They have come up to London from Somersetshire to find, as they term it, a respectable detective unconnected with the Police—such a one as they have been reading about lately in the magazines. I gave them your name. As I have said before, I have no idea of the nature of their business, but for the rest, notwithstanding their amazing habits, prejudices and, I fear I must add, appearance, you can accept them as they themselves desire to be known, as ladies belonging to a great though declining family, daughters of the late Earl of St.

Mallory, who once owned half the county in which they live. They are in comparatively reduced circumstances nowadays, but they are able to pay for anything they want. They have been clients of my firm, and the family before them of my predecessors, for several hundred years. All the same, as I have already confided, they refuse to tell me what they want.

Bless me or curse me, my dear Slane, as you will, but confess that I have provided you with a unique experience.

Ever yours,
PAUL CODRINGTON.

PS.—I hope they arrive in the barouche!"

Slane folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket. He caught the girl's covert gaze as he did so, and surprised in the blue depths of her eyes the light of an incipient hostility which puzzled him. She seemed to have come as an enemy.

"My letter from Mr. Codrington," Jasper Slane said, "tells me that you are in some difficulty, concerning which you wish to consult me."

"A grave and serious difficulty," Lady Henrietta acknowledged precisely.

"A difficulty which has afforded us considerable anxiety," her sister pursued.

"If my advice is of any service to you, ladies," Slane continued, "I shall of course be delighted to give it. Perhaps you had better confide in me to the extent of telling me the nature of the trouble."

Lady Henrietta coughed.

"The nature of the trouble," Lady Susannah repeated.

The girl moved a few steps across the room and flung herself into an easy-chair.

"The whole business," Lady Henrietta declared, "can scarcely be explained here. Our trouble is connected with the Golden Bird of Mallory."

"With—I beg your pardon—with what?" Slane asked.

"The Golden Bird of Mallory," Lady Henrietta repeated.

"Of Mallory," Lady Susannah interpolated.

"I am sorry," Slane regretted. "I am afraid I don't quite understand."

"Perhaps," the girl suggested, with a disagreeable smile, "Sir Jasper Slane will tell us that he has never heard of the Golden Bird of Mallory?"

"The young lady is quite right," Slane admitted. "That is actually my position. I have never heard of the Golden Bird of Mallory."

Lady Henrietta looked at him fixedly, her dark eyes searching his, as though to satisfy herself whether or not this man were telling the truth. Lady Susannah frankly opened her mouth in in-

credulous astonishment. The girl in the chair laughed.

"Of course I am terribly sorry," Slane apologised, with an effort at good-natured levity, "but my knowledge of golden birds is limited to plovers. If you would give me an idea—"

Lady Henrietta had recovered herself.

"You are not an antiquarian, Sir Jasper?"

"You have no taste for old treasures?" Lady Susannah sighed.

"You have never been down to our home in the West," the girl in the chair murmured.

"Lady Henrietta," Sir Jasper confessed, "I can only repeat that, however great may be the enormity of my offence, I never heard of the Golden Bird of Mallory. Is it the name of an heirloom? Does it live? Has it any real place in bird life? From what point of view do I regard it?"

"In your profession, Sir Jasper," Lady Henrietta said tolerantly, "you have probably found little time for what in my younger days we used to call the arts and graces of life. The Golden Bird of Mallory is one of the most famous and priceless heirlooms remaining among the ancient families of Great Britain. There are a dozen books in the British Museum which would afford you full particulars of it. Any history of the County of Somerset would do the same. A collection of seventeenth-century volumes concerning it, which we possess at Mallory, is greatly prized."

"Greatly prized by all of us," Lady Susannah echoed.

"I am very sorry," Jasper Slane apologised once more. "Now I think of the matter from the light of an heirloom, I believe my memory is astir. Didn't one of your family in the days of Queen Anne—?"

"King James," Lady Henrietta corrected.

"King James," Lady Susannah reiterated with some severity.

"I shall throw myself upon your consideration," Slane decided. "Tell me about it yourself, Lady Henrietta."

"I will do so," the latter acquiesced, "in as few words as possible.

"Many volumes have been written concerning the Golden Bird of Mallory. Seven of the most famous horologists in Switzerland gave their lives to it, and our great-great-great-grandfather dissipated a large share of the family fortunes upon its production.

"The Golden Bird of Mallory, Sir Jasper, was fashioned in Florence by a worker of metals who claimed for himself that he was a direct descendant of Benvenuto Cellini. Be that as it may, it was discovered by the third

Earl of St. Mallory when he was travelling through Italy on a special errand from the King of this country to the Pope. The grains of madness may have been in his brain before then. Who can say? One only knows that he hurried over his mission, hastened back to England, raised a large sum of money from his estates and, returning to Sienna, bought the Golden Bird."

"Bought it and carried it off home with him," Lady Susannah echoed.

"Before his journey to Italy," Lady Henrietta continued, "this forefather of ours was what is known as a man of fashion—a beau about town—a gambler. From the moment he possessed that bird he was a changed man. This I can show you in all the documents and letters and family papers kept by our Chaplain in those days, and now extant."

"A changed man," Lady Susannah murmured.

"London knew him no more," her sister proceeded. "Complaints of his absence came from the Court, of which he took no notice. A famous prince travelled down to Mallory to see for himself what had happened to change so completely one of the gayest men about town. It was all of no avail. We cannot disbelieve the written evidence of those days, Sir Jasper, and therefore I must ask you to believe what we, who are of the family and know the authenticity of the documents, also believe, that, morning till night, our forefather did nothing except sit in his study with the bird close to him, gazing at it, wondering at it. If he walked in the gardens, he carried it. His preserves, his partridge shooting and his hunters were neglected. During the day it was on the table before him; at night it stood by his bedside. An infatuation such as this could lead only in one direction, but at the time no one realised what was coming."

"No one realised," Lady Susannah sighed.

"The records state that one day Lord St. Mallory, who had scarcely spoken for three days, suddenly leaped to his feet. 'It must sing,' he declared. They thought then that he was going mad. His wife, who had reasoned with him in vain, had departed to the gayer life of London. He was almost alone at Mallory. Three or four times that day he is reported to have repeated that one phrase—'It must sing.'

"On the following morning he ordered post-chaises and express relays of horses to Dover. At night he departed, carrying with him the Golden Bird. He travelled with all the speed that was possible in those days to Switzerland, and sought out there the great horologists of the day. He left England in 1687, during the

month of May, a young man of twenty-eight years old.

"He returned to his estates fourteen years later, a prematurely old man of forty-two, only to find his wife long since departed, at first with one lover and then with another, until at last death had taken her. He found his estates shrunken, his farms and lands neglected, his servants—those who had survived—grown fat and lazy; but he brought back with him the Golden Bird of Mallory, and it sang."

"He brought it back," Lady Susannah murmured, "and it sang."

"It did what?" Slane inquired, a little bewildered.

"It sang," Lady Henrietta repeated. "Acre after acre of the fruitful lands of Mallory had been sold to keep working those eight Swiss workmen. Every minute of their day was given to the one task. There were three or four failures, but in the end they succeeded. The Golden Bird of Mallory sang. That, Sir Jasper, is half the story. The other half you can only hear at Mallory."

There came to Jasper Slane at that moment a sudden idea that the madness of the ancestor of whom they had been speaking found some faint recrudescence in these two amazing old ladies—that it was a tale of lunacy to which he had listened.

He looked across at the girl. Her manner was still merely indifferent. Metaphorically speaking, he shook himself. Though he had been carried away a little by the strange speech and story of these quaint visitors, he decided that an absolutely commonplace attitude on his part was necessary.

"Most interesting story I ever heard in my life," he declared. "And now what has happened? Is the bird lost?"

Promptly he bitterly regretted his speech. On the faces of the two ladies opposite him was something of the expression which might have crossed the face of Beethoven if he had wandered in upon a recital of jazz music. He felt as if he had been guilty of whistling in a cathedral just as the first notes of the organ were sounding for evensong and the choir filing into their places.

Neither of them said anything for a moment. Lady Henrietta's lips quivered.

"The Golden Bird remains at Mallory, Sir Jasper Slane," she said quietly; "yet there has arisen a certain circumstance in connection with it upon which we require the advice—I must confess it—of the materialist, of a person of business such as yourself."

"A man of the world," Lady Susannah added.

"We desire," Lady Henrietta continued, "to engage you for a

brief visit to Mallory. One day perhaps, or two should be sufficient. We trust that your fee will not be excessive, but whatever it is we are prepared to pay it."

"Quite prepared to pay it," Lady Susannah echoed.

The girl rose to her feet and stood upon the hearthrug. Slane for the moment could think of nothing else but of the amazing effect she would make standing in just that same attitude, but in the clothes of the moment and with a cigarette drooping from her lips. She had all the flair, the discontented insolence, and the fine looks of one of the intellectual and reckless prowlers into the by-ways of life.

"I am not allowed to talk much," she confided, "but I am going to say this on behalf of my brother and myself—and, after all, my brother is head of the family, even though he's a cripple. What I say is that we don't want any strangers down at Mallory. This thing has come to us. It's a family affair. Let's deal with it alone."

The crushing rebuke which Slane had expected did not come. There was a certain firmness in Lady Henrietta's speech, but also something of tolerance.

"My niece is not concerned in this business," she pronounced. "It is true that my nephew is head of the house, but he is not yet of age. I consider myself the custodian of the Mallory fortunes. Therefore I invite you, Sir Jasper Slane, to accept the commission I offer you and to pay us this visit at Mallory."

"And I strongly advise you," the girl said, "to do nothing of the sort."

"Really," Slane murmured good-humouredly, "I find my position a little embarrassing."

"There is no need for embarrassment," Lady Henrietta assured him. "My niece is young. Her voice in the matter is of no account. My sister and I are agreed."

"But cannot you give me an idea," Slane persisted, "what the nature of the trouble is? The bird, you say, has not been stolen. Where, then, are my services required?"

"The bird," Lady Henrietta repeated, "has not been stolen. It shall sing to you upon the evening of your arrival, and you will remember it until your dying day. Our hospitality, I fear, is somewhat meagre nowadays, but we can make you comfortable for a night. If you care to bring your rod, there is an over-stocked trout stream. We will send a car or someone to meet you at Mallory station. The train leaves Paddington at twelve o'clock and you change at Taunton. Thursday will be most convenient to us. The fee you will kindly arrange through our solicitor, Mr.

Codrington. I think that concludes our business."

"It concludes our business," Lady Susannah echoed.

The two ladies rose to their feet. Slane was speechless. They both wore brooches set with large and valuable garnets. Gold chains, attached to which were lockets containing, without a doubt, some ancient miniatures, hung round their necks. Their hair was as smoothly brushed as the coiffure of a modern Eton crop. They diffused somehow or other a faint odour of lavender and lavender-scented chests.

"But I am not sure—" Slane began. "It is very kind of you, but I am busy just now."

"I think that you will be so good as to come," Lady Henrietta predicted, as she turned towards the door.

"So very good," Lady Susannah cooed.

"Well, it's your own trouble," the girl observed sulkily.

They made no attempt to shake hands. Parkins, who had arrived in response to his master's ring, was holding open the door. Lady Henrietta first, with a courteous inclination of the head, Lady Susannah next, with an exactly similar salutation, and the girl last, with a flash of the eyes and half-gesture of the lips which puzzled him, passed from the room.

Once more Jasper Slane forgot his manners. He stood by his curtains and stared out after them until the cockaded footman had thrown open the gate; until they had, in dignified fashion, entered the barouche; until the man had mounted to his place and the coachman, also cockaded, had touched with the whip his slumbering horses, and, to the amazement of passers-by in St. James's Avenue, Hampstead, the cavalcade had started off.

When, on the following Thursday evening, Slane descended from the train on to the tiny platform of the miniature station, which seemed set in an oasis of buttercup-bespangled meadows, of apple orchards and cows knee-deep in meadow grass, the little cockaded groom stepped forward, greeted him respectfully, and possessed himself of his suit-case. Slane followed him out into the dusty lane and stared for a moment in astonishment at the vehicle awaiting him—a Ford car driven by a chauffeur in worn livery, by whose side the groom promptly climbed.

They started off with some wheezing, and almost immediately entered a very beautiful park—treeless at first, but rich in wonderful pastureland. Presently the road mounted and wound its way through a magnificent curving grove of chestnuts, at the end of which was a fine view of a great mansion

bearing however, many sad evidences of neglect and lack of repair.

At the door Slane was greeted by an elderly servant, attended in the rear by a youth in faded blue livery.

"If you will be so good as to come this way, Sir Jasper," the man begged. "One flight of stairs only."

Slane followed his guide up a glorious staircase into a great corridor. The man, with a flourish, threw open the door of a huge apartment in which even the great four-poster bed seemed lost.

"Their ladyships will receive you in the drawing-room at half-past seven," he announced. "Dinner is served at a quarter to eight. Their ladyships desired me to ask you if you would accept some refreshment after your journey."

"Nothing whatever, thank you," Slane replied hastily.

"If you will give me your keys, sir, I will attend to your belongings. Her ladyship insists upon having servants from the village, and these young men are not to be trusted with gentlemen's clothes."

Slane obeyed without a word. He walked to the window, and looked across the rich Somerset landscape with its pastures and its rolling hills which seemed to fade into a faint blue mist.

"We are alone to-night, sir," the man continued, "but his lordship as a rule wears a long coat. Their ladyships prefer it, and I see that you are provided."

"Why, of course," Slane agreed. "You will find the pearl studs just inside the jewel-box."

The old man completed his task with the dexterity of practice, but with the stiffness of rheumatic fingers and failing eyesight. He looked back from the door.

"You will ring if you require anything, sir," he begged. "There is hot water on the side there."

Baths were evidently a luxury at Mallory, so Jasper Slane dressed himself in leisurely fashion, then descended and strolled for a quarter of an hour round the remains of some marvellous gardens.

Suddenly he came face to face with the girl. She was obviously as much surprised to see him as he was to meet her.

"So you've come?"

"I—yes, I've come," Slane agreed. "What a wonderful place it is!"

"It's a wonderful place going as fast as it can to rack and ruin," she said sadly. "That's the curse of the Golden Bird, you know. Never mind. I'm glad to see you for a moment alone. I want to tell you that I hate your coming, and for your own sake as well as everyone else's I advise you

to take no notice of any offer they may make you."

"You aren't what I call hospitable," he remarked, wondering how it was possible for a girl in an ill-cut white muslin dress, which he felt sure had been dragged out from some old chest and remade by a village dressmaker, with a yellow rose at her bosom and masses of deep brown hair which had apparently never been subjected to the coiffeur's arts, to be so beautiful.

"I am as you find me," she answered calmly. "I'm not pleased to see you, neither is Jocelyn. You may as well understand that from the first. This is a family business in which no one has any right to interfere. Shall we go in? My aunts will be expecting you."

"I think that it is very doubtful that I, at any rate, will interfere," Slane assured her, a little nettled. "I didn't come here of my own will; I came at your aunt's earnest request."

"Oh, brother!" the girl exclaimed. "Who cares why you came? You're here, and I wish you weren't, that's all! Come along! I'll show you the way into the drawing-room. It's more than you deserve."

She led him into the house and into a large drawing-room, architecturally splendid, but with strange spaces on the walls, and in the air a mingled odour of camphor and lavender, and a curious mouldiness, as though from long disuse.

His two hostesses rose to receive him.

"You are very welcome to Mallory, Sir Jasper," Lady Henrietta said.

"Very welcome," Lady Susannah repeated.

He shook hands with them both for the first time. Their fingers were laden with rings, mostly inset with rare, old-fashioned stones. Their brooches were gone, but both wore quaint lockets of black onyx encircled with pearls. Their dresses, he could have sworn, had been brought out from the treasure chests above, and left untouched.

"This is my nephew," Lady Henrietta announced, turning to a youth who sat in an easy-chair with a rubber-tipped stick by his side. "He desires also to welcome you to Mallory."

The young man rose awkwardly to his feet, and shook hands with an obvious ill grace. He was good-looking but pale, with hollows under his eyes. He was suffering, Jasper Slane decided, either from bad health or dissipation.

"My nephew, since his unfortunate accident, which prevents his enjoying country sports," Lady Henrietta explained, "lives chiefly in London or Paris."

"Very hard luck to miss the shooting here, I should think,"

Slane murmured, utterly at a loss to know what to say to a young man who, he felt instinctively, resented his presence.

"Not many pheasants left," the head of the house replied. "They find better homes than Mallory these days . . ."

Dinner was punctually announced, and a ceremonious procession was arranged into the dining-room—another fine but meagerly furnished apartment.

Slane decided afterwards that it was the strangest meal he had ever sat through. The glass of sherry which he was offered with his soup bore the name of the local grocer, and was absolutely undrinkable. Then, to his amazement, with the joint he was served with claret of almost incredible age, a Château wine, still soft and velvety.

Lady Henrietta smiled at his signs of appreciation.

"Mallory," she remarked, "once had famous cellars. A little of its old wine still remains."

"I have never tasted anything like this," Slane declared truthfully.

So far as conversation was concerned the meal was a nightmare. The girl said nothing except in an undertone to her brother, and the contributions of Lady Henrietta and her sister to the conversation of the moment were so stilted as to give him all the time a sense of unreality, an uncomfortable idea that he was a modern visitant in an atmosphere which he failed to absorb, a guest among people to whom he personally was an unwelcome necessity. He began to wonder whether there were any means of stealing away.

Towards the end of the meal, however, a sudden change took place in his feelings. He realised for the first time that his two hostesses were deeply concerned by the attitude of the head of the house and his sister. Lady Henrietta's voice shook for a moment when she addressed him just before rising.

"I feel, Sir Jasper," she said, "that you will go away with an ill opinion of the hospitality of Mallory, but I hope you will always remember that you came at the wish of its present *châtelaine.*"

"Thank you very much," Slane murmured, a little startled.

"I shall break an established custom," his hostess continued. "I shall not ask you to stay and drink wine with my nephew who has, I fear, in his wanderings, become unaccustomed to the society of gentlemen. Will you be so kind as to escort my sister and myself to the library, where I shall tell you the trouble we are in."

"The sad trouble we are in," Lady Susannah sighed.

Slane rose at once to his feet and walked with them towards the door. It was impossible not to hear the beginning of an alter-

cation between the brother and sister, who remained in their places. Lady Henrietta led the way across the hall to another room of faded glories—smaller, however, and with more furniture.

"Please serve the coffee here," she directed the servant, who had also escorted them. "I have little choice in liqueurs to offer you, Sir Jasper, but we have the original Chartreuse."

With the coffee and liqueurs—the former served in cups of Sèvres china—the young man, still leaning on this stick, came lounging in with his sister. At the closing of the door, Lady Henrietta rose to her feet.

"Sir Jasper," she announced, "I shall show you now the Golden Bird of Mallory."

She unlocked a great oaken cabinet, set into the wall—a cabinet framed with wood which seemed almost half a foot thick. Then she lifted out the marvellous presentment of a bird and set it almost reverently upon the table. Slane gazed at it in amazement. It was made like a canary, but six times the size, and even to the most ignorant the fashioning of it was a wonderful thing. Its eyes were startlingly real—of some soft brown stone which seemed to catch and reflect strange lights.

"May I feel the weight?" Slane asked.

"You may," Lady Henrietta assented.

He held it up, and set it down with astonishment.

"This is of solid gold?" he gasped.

"Of solid gold," his hostess admitted.

"Gold," Lady Susannah murmured.

"Now," Lady Henrietta continued, "I shall tell you of the third epoch of my forefather's madness. First of all he so loved this bird for its shape, its wonder, its amazing workmanship, that he spent an enormous sum in its purchase. Then, when it became an obsession to him, he sought out the most skilful makers of artificial music in the world to produce its miraculous song. Thirdly—where he got the idea from no one knows—but he ruined this House with his third idea. People have searched through manuscripts and records to find some hint, some fable, from which he might have derived his unhappy thought, but they searched in vain. You shall see for yourself what I can afterwards explain in a few words. First the bird must sing. For all these generations we have respected the wish of Henry of Mallory: only members of the family have known its secrets. Will you please turn your back for a moment? I ask no more than that."

Slane approached the window,

and looked out into the darkening twilight. As he stood there, a strange note of music crept out into the room. Lady Susannah touched his arm.

"It's finished," she told him. "Listen!"

Slane listened entranced. It was music which he was unable to tabulate, which seemed yet to have some definite rhythm, some purpose, as though it were the song of a bird which had sat on the windowsill of one of the great masters, and had been touched with fire. It reached the end of what might have been a prelude, and then—Slane suddenly called out in amazement.

As the bird sang, there dropped from its throat on to the table upon which it stood a cascade of glittering stones—diamonds, pearls, amethysts, amber, yellow, golden. All the time its song continued, rising sometimes to the sweetest of high notes, falling now and then to a deep passionate quiver. The bird sang and the jewels flowed for a period of time at which Slane could not even guess; and then came the fading away of the song, the lower notes, the last sad, almost lamenting, cry. The bird was once more an inanimate thing of precious metal. The tablecloth all around it was strewn with jewels.

"Amazing!" Slane gasped. "Absolutely amazing! You must forgive me. I really have never imagined anything like that."

"You can realise, now that I have shown you this, the third idea of Henry of Mallory, the idea which cost his House its fortune," Lady Henrietta said sadly. "Jewels must fall from its mouth while the Golden Bird, which he prized more than his heart or soul or fortune, sang. He went back to Switzerland. They did it for him somehow or other, and Mallory was stripped bare—pictures, acres, anything that could be turned into money—so that gems should fall from the throat of his plaything."

"An astonishing idea!" Slane muttered. "But surely the value of these stones must be enormous?"

There was silence. The young man in the corner rose to his feet. They heard the stump of his stick on the floor.

"Aunt," he said harshly, "once more I protest. This is a family affair. We want no detectives about the place."

Lady Henrietta drew herself up, and the young man seemed to become insignificant.

"Until your twenty-first birthday, sir," she reminded him, "I rule here. There are other rooms in this house."

He turned away. His aunt took up a handful of gems and dropped them carelessly into Slane's hand.

"Sir Jasper," she inquired, "do

you know anything about precious stones?"

"A little," he admitted.

She brought a candle to the table.

"Look at those," she invited.

He did as he was bidden, and a strange doubt suddenly assailed him. She nodded.

"You are right," she acknowledged. "These jewels are false, every one of them imitations. A few years ago all were real. Twelve months ago the jewels that poured from the throat of the Golden Bird of Mallory were worth enough to buy back the estates and raise our family once more to its rightful position. To-day, they are only fit to be mounted in a silver setting and sold in a cardboard box from a Taunton jeweller's."

There was deep silence in the room. They heard the stump of a stick and the opening of a door. Brother and sister had gone.

"Who else has access to the Bird?" Slane asked.

"No one except the family and the man who unpacked your bag, who has been in our service for forty-two years. The servants of the household are village folk who would scarcely know the value of the commonest jewel, and who live the simplest of lives, with which they are perfectly content. We have no visitors. No guest save yourself has slept in this house for twelve months. Sir Jasper Slane, they say that you are a clever man. Will you help us to find where those jewels have gone?"

He walked once more to the window. The darkness had fallen now. He stood there so long that Lady Henrietta came in search of him.

"You will help us, Sir Jasper?"

"Let me think this over until to-morrow," he begged.

Slane saw the dawn break as he walked across the park the next morning, and the dews rise from the lower meadows. Lady Henrietta read the note which he had left for her, hours after he was seated in the milk train on his way to London:

"Dear Lady Henrietta.

Alas, your problem is beyond me. I cannot accept your commission.

With all my regrets.
Sincerely yours,
JASPER SLANE."

Nevertheless, by a strange trick of Fate it was Jasper Slane who solved the mystery of the Golden Bird, and brought back to Mallory its former glories.

Entering the Casino a few months later on the first evening of his annual visit to Monte Carlo, Slane received a shock as he passed through the outer rooms, which for the moment made him feel physically sick.

He steadied himself by the back of a croupier's chair, and the people round glanced curiously at this big, bronzed Englishman who had suddenly the look in his eyes of a man who sees a ghost.

The shock was naturally only a matter of seconds and presently, dazed though he was, Slane recovered himself and walked cautiously towards the table on his left, which he had been passing.

Seated by the side of the croupier was a woman dressed simply and plainly in black, wearing a black hat, and no ornaments; she was prim, erect and angular. About her appearance there was something entirely different from that of the other habitués of the "Kitchen." Her face, though her eyes were tired and her coiffure unbecoming, had retained its aristocratic outline. Her utter indifference to her neighbours and surroundings was in itself noticeable. Furthermore, she was playing in maximums, which, in the "Kitchen," is unusual; and notwithstanding the magnitude of her venture, she scarcely even raised her eyes until the ball had ceased to roll and fallen into its place.

Five times Slane, standing opposite to her, watched her lose the whole of her stake. A great pile of plaques which had been in front of her was now so far reduced that, with the sixth spin, she was left almost without a jeton. This time she raised her eyes and watched the progress of the ball. It hovered between two numbers, and finally fell.

Then, for a moment, there was an expression of terrified and shuddering despair. She withdrew her eyes slowly, and at that moment saw Slane. For a second she looked at him blankly. Then she beckoned him across.

He pushed his way through the crowd of people who had been surrounding her, and bent over her hand.

"A great surprise this, Lady Susannah."

"I wish you," she said calmly, "to lend me five mille—five thousand francs."

Slane hesitated.

"Lady Susannah," he remonstrated, "I have watched you sitting here and losing for some time. Don't you think—?"

"You will lend me that money, please," she interrupted. "I tell you that you will have it back before the end of the evening, only you must be quick. Everything has gone as I had expected, but the change of cycle is just a little late and my capital was a trifle too small. Now the time has come though. This next stake will be a winning one. That I know. There is no doubt, but you must hurry, please."

The fateful cry *"Faites vos jeux,"* had already left the croupiers' lips.

Slane, abandoning any attempt

at argument, produced the five mille. Lady Susannah pushed them calmly towards the croupier.

"*Le même jeu,*" she directed, with no evidence of hurry.

The *chef* leaned forward and nodded. The croupier himself had hesitated. Simultaneously the opposite croupier uttered the parrot-like call: "*Rien ne va plus.*" The ball fell into its place.

Lady Susannah scarcely glanced up. The croupier by her side hastily arranged a maximum upon one of the central numbers.

"You have won?" Slane asked eagerly.

Once more the mask lifted from her face. There was a certain amount of surprise as she turned round.

"Of course I have won," she replied. "I told you I would. The time has come. Stay where you are, please, although I shall require no more money from you. I may need your help afterwards."

Slaine, within the next half-hour, was in danger of being suffocated. News of sensational play soon spreads, especially in the "Kitchen," where loiterers are many, and people were presently standing seven-deep round the table.

Lady Susannah might just as well have been seated in her faded Victorian drawing-room at Mallory, for all the notice she took of them or interest she evinced in the play. Every time she staked, and her stake varied according to a book which she continually consulted, she won. They changed her milles into ten mille plaques, her ten milles into fifty. She was soon almost barricaded by a wall of long amber-coloured discs.

The *chef* motioned to one of those silent figures always gliding about and two of them—the Casino's detectives — wormed their way one on each side of her. There came a time when her worn, elegant fingers traced a few figures on the fly-leaf of the book. She added them up, and closed it.

"I have finished," she announced quietly. "Can one have a *coffre ort?*"

They cleared a space round the table. Play was suspended. Her winnings were counted by both *chefs*, and a note handed to her. She rose and leaned on Slane's arm.

"You will escort me, if you please, to the *caisse*," she begged.

She was conducted to one of the mysterious private bureaux in which exceptional transactions are sometimes recorded. Again the money was counted. Higher authorities had to be sent for, and the draft which she was at last handed was almost staggering in its amount. She merely glanced at it, and passed it on to Slane.

"Place this in your pocket-book, please," she enjoined. "Will you be so kind as to give me a sandwich and a glass of wine."

"Let me take you to the *Salles Privées*," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"It is here," she said, "that I lost, and it is here that Fate has repaid me. We will go to the room across the way. I should like two sandwiches and a glass of wine of any sort."

Her voice had become weaker, and he fancied that her hand fell a little heavily upon his arm as they crossed the room. He found two easy-chairs, ordered a pint of the best champagne, some sandwiches, and a whiskey-and-soda for himself. She took a sip of the wine, and raised the sandwich to her lips. Then she sat down. Her voice was very faint; otherwise she seemed as usual.

"You will take the draft to Mallory," she directed. "It is fortunate for me that you were here."

She leaned further back in her chair. Slane threw open the window, and called for a waiter. It was all too late. Lady Susannah was dead.

Slane and the girl, a month or so later, munched sandwiches in the shadow of a beech tree overhanging the famous trout stream of Mallory. This time Slane had used his rod, and with good result. The spring afternoon was warm. A certain reserve seemed to have passed away, and for the first time they talked freely.

"You have been rather wonderful," the girl acknowledged. "You did everything for poor Aunt Susannah. You brought us back that great sum of money, and you never asked a question. Perhaps we too were a little tongue-tied. To-day I feel like talking."

"Then tell me," he begged "what on earth first took your aunt to Monte Carlo?"

"I will tell you. Six years ago I had a cousin—an invalid cousin—living in Mentone. Her mother died. It became a charge upon one of the family to spend a month with her each year. My Aunt Susannah went the first year. She had never been abroad before, and you can imagine how flustered she must have been. When the year came round again, however, she volunteered to go once more, and we now know that this time she took some of the jewels, for there was little enough money. She took them, of course, as one realises, merely with the idea of doing what everyone else seemed to find so easy—winning money to restore our fortunes. That went on. This is the fifth year. Each year she took some of the jewels, and replaced them with false, and the strange part of it was that my cousin, unknown to us,

has been dead four years. She still went out—still went on her terrible quest."

"But didn't you guess?" Slane asked.

The girl shook her head.

"I can assure you that each time when she returned she was unchanged. She had nothing to say. She slipped back into her place. She never gave one the slightest impression of having done anything unusual. Only there were certain books—we thought they were religious books, and that she was thinking of becoming a Catholic—which she used to study alone. They are in her room now. Every system that was ever invented is expounded in them, but also there are hundreds of pages of calculations in her thin, spidery figures. She seems to have taken three systems, and worked out one for herself—and all the time the jewels went."

"Now let me ask you another question," he ventured. "You remember my first visit here. Why did you hate my coming down so?"

"Can't you imagine?" she retorted. "Now take the four of us. Aunt Henrietta never had the faintest suspicion that any member of the House of Mallory could have taken the jewels; she believed that some outside thief had somehow got at them. The idea of the police was loathsome to her. She went to the lawyer, and to you."

"But that doesn't account—" he began.

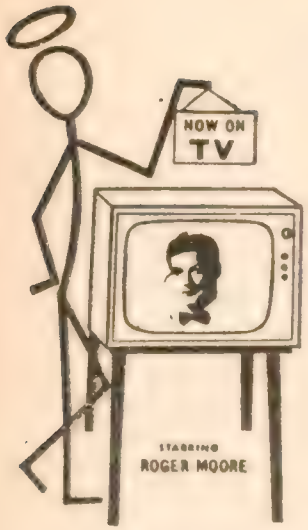
"Listen," she interrupted. "Can't you see? I knew it could have been no one outside. Therefore I thought at once of Jocelyn, who does gamble sometimes in Paris. On the other hand, because he had met me once in the library at night, and because, I am afraid, I am always grumbling at our poverty, he believed it was I. Aunt Susannah knew. So there we were. Poor Aunt Susannah!"

"I don't know that you need pity her," Slane reflected. "She accomplished her purpose, curiously enough, to the sensation of the whole of the Riviera. And I can tell you this: when I threw open the window and turned round to feel her hand, she just looked up for a second, and smiled. She died with that smile upon her lips—a person who had accomplished her life's purpose."

They were both silent for a moment. Perhaps for both of them the beech leaves were a little blurred.

"And now," Slane concluded, "I think we ought to abandon this lazy pursuit and get back to that tennis, Miss Mallory."

"I think," she replied, as she sprung lightly to her feet, "that after all you have done for the family you ought to call me Rosemary."



LESLIE CHARTERIS'

The saint on TV

Inspector Teal's Most Baffling Case

Chief Inspector Claude Eustace Teal, that very worthy if prejudiced Scotland Yard officer, must be a very puzzled man since Simon Templar came to the television screens in the guise of the good-looking Roger Moore.

Claude Eustace, as long-standing readers of "The Saint" stories will know, has spent much of his police career trying to get Templar behind prison bars, though their antagonism is purely professional. Beneath it all is a basis of friendliness, perhaps mutual admiration and maybe, in a brotherly fashion, even affection. Teal, in fact, will come to the Saint's aid when necessary.

It seems rather unfair, therefore, that the unfortunate Claude Eustace should now be scratching his head in his Scotland Yard office as he tries to solve his most baffling case—the case of Claude Eustace Teal himself.

The dossier reads:—

Story: "The Man Who Was Lucky."
Player masquerading as Teal: Campbell Singer.
Description: Thick-set, muscular, dark-haired (and quite a lot of it though receding).

Story: "The Elusive Ellshaw."
Player masquerading as Teal: Norman Pitt.
Description: Genial, 17-stone, 6'1", almost bald, has frequently understudied and doubled for Robert Morley, but usually plays "distinguished" roles.

Story: "Starring the Saint."
Player masquerading as Teal: Wensley Pithey.
Description: Burly, heavy-jowled, iron-grey hair, 5'10" in height.

Stories: "Iris," "The Rough Diamonds," "The Saint Plays With Fire" and "The Lawless Lady."

Player masquerading as Teal: Ivor Dean.
Description: Plumpish, with an easy-going exterior, balding and 5'10½" in height.

From the above, it can be seen that four different players have portrayed Claude Eustace in the TV series and that, at last, one player—Ivor Dean—has settled down into the role.

Confusing? Maybe. But not, perhaps, to the extent that might have been the case had Inspector Teal appeared regularly. He turns up very infrequently until the last few episodes and, though identified in the credits, mention of his name has been avoided as much as possible in the actual pictures.

You can, if you like, believe that Claude Eustace has been disguising himself. There is also the undeniable fact that all the really great characters of fiction, including Hamlet and Simon Templar himself, have been portrayed by a wide variety of distinguished actors. Claude Eustace Teal is therefore in illustrious company and really ought to take it as an honour that four different players have given their interpretations of him.

Wensley Pithey as Inspector Teal

Ivor Dean as Inspector Teal

There is, of course, a simple enough explanation for the casting switches—just as there is usually the simplest of explanations in the most perplexing of crime cases. In this particular case, there is nothing mysterious about the changes. Because Teal crops up only intermittently in the stories chosen for filming, it would be out of the question to keep one actor on contract the whole time.

"We've been rather unlucky," the producers, Robert Baker and Monty Berman, will tell you. "Each time we have introduced a story introducing Teal we have, of course, tried to cast one of the actors previously seen in the role; but, each time, they have been working on other productions.

"Now we consider ourselves lucky to have found Ivor Dean for the part. Most people we have come across seem to regard him as an ideal Teal."

As the only actor who has played the part more than once, Ivor Dean may be regarded as the television Teal.

"There's one very odd aspect to this casting," he says. "When I first appeared in 'The Saint,' I was playing an entirely different character. This was in the story, 'Starring the Saint.' I was the unpleasant lawyer, and Teal was played by Wensley Pithey."

The risk of viewers being confused at this double-characterisation is remote. Ivor Dean was in disguise for "Starring the Saint."

"I was supposed to look degenerate," he explains, "so the make-up man got to work on me, gave me a few lines on my face and did something to my eyes to provide an air of debauchery. I hope I don't really look in the least like that!"

Inspector Teal, however, is straight acting on the part of this Londoner who has been an actor since he completed his wartime Army career and has played character roles in several feature films, including "Anastasia" and "Becket," as well as numerous stage and television productions. He is also a stage producer and, as a sideline, writes television plays, with 14 of them produced to date.

"The Saint" marks a new departure for him in that one type of character he has rarely played in the past has been a detective. His Teal role is therefore by no means typecasting.

He is a man of 46, and a family man at that, with three daughters whose ages range from twelve to just under two.

Teal's infrequent appearances in the series are, of course, due to Simon Templar's wanderlust. The stories filmed for television cover a span of over thirty years of Saint stories, and these range over a considerable area of the

world. Chief Inspector Teal is on hand only when Templar is in London. Which is probably just as well, otherwise he might have succeeded by now in getting the better of his adversary.

This, in fact, did happen during the filming of one episode, though it certainly wasn't intended. The actor playing Teal (and, with Saint-like generosity, we'll refrain from identfying him) obviously wasn't as well-versed in the story-line as he should have been.

They were shooting the climax to the story. The Saint had come to grips with the ungodly one, who was cornered and crouching with a gun in his hand, as Teal and a posse of policemen burst through the door.

Their instructions were to hurl themselves at the crook. A slight case of wrong identification led to the body of heavily-built men flinging themselves at the unsuspecting Roger Moore. He disappeared beneath the heaving mass!

Perhaps it was the ghost of the outraged Claude Eustace avenging the varying portrayals of himself!

The Saint (Roger Moore) meets his creator (Leslie Charteris)

riddle of the black spade

by Stuart Palmer

Uninvited and unannounced, a spare feminine figure burst into the sacrosanct precincts of the New York homicide bureau, waving a late newspaper rather as if it had been a banner. Inspector Oscar Piper looked up from the reports on his scarred oaken desk, and said, "Oh, it's *you* again!" without any obvious pleasure.

But Miss Hildegarde Withers was quite undaunted. "Busy or not, Oscar Piper, you ought to be out on Long Island this afternoon instead of idling away at Centre Street and fouling the atmosphere with cigar-smoke." She opened the paper with a snap. "Listen!" she insisted. "*Exsolon dies in freak accident. David E. Farling, former state senator (and more recently a prominent defense attorney), was fatally injured by a golf ball while playing at Meadowland late this forenoon. Farling was a member of a foursome consisting of his son Ronald, Samuel Firth (his law partner), and prominent political figure Jerry T. Sullivan. The body was discovered—*"

"If you *must* read the paper to

One of the delights of yesterday was the adventures of the formidable Hildegarde Withers, Inspector Piper's particular cross, the spinster schoolteacher who had this almost frightening sensitivity to where murder would strike next—and who more than often was right when she'd insist that black really was *white. . . . We are delighted to be able to bring you another story about this woman whose contributions to the field were* so *unique. . . .* *H.S.S.*

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me, why not read the funnies?"

"Quiet, Oscar! *Farling was discovered by fellow-golfers lying face down near a large pond which forms one of the natural hazards of the seventh hole. Beside him lay the golf ball which had evidently struck his skull with terrific impact. The identity of the person who struck the fatal ball has not yet been determined, but—*"

"Yes, Hildegarde! I *know* all that. It came in on the ticker."

"Well," snorted the maiden schoolteacher, "do you happen to know that the story goes on to point out that while half a dozen people are injured on the golf course by flying balls every year, this is almost the first-known actual *fatality*?"

"So there's a first time for everything!"

"And do you happen to know that David Farling and Jerry Sullivan were deadly enemies only as late as last October? They debated before the Uptown League of Independent Women Voters, and the things they *did* to each other—Mr. Farling called Mr. Sullivan a turncoat for turning his back on Mr. Smith—or was it Mr. Landon?—and supporting Mr. Hoover—or was it Mr. Stevenson, and—"

"So they cooled off and became friends again. Politics, Hildegarde! But if it makes you feel any better, I've already sent one of my best boys out to help the Queens authorities on this case. Farling is too important a man to pass over his death easy—I mean for *us* to—and there are too many people whose toes he's stepped on—"

"Oscar, your grammar is as bad as your cigars! But don't you forget—this *could* be murder!" Miss Withers sniffed. "There is something fishy about this affair! Just because it happened right out in the bright sunshine instead of in a speakeasy, and just because the weapon was a golf ball instead of a knife—" She took a deep breath. "Oscar, who *was* the person who found Mr. Farling's body?"

"According to the first reports, it was the greenskeeper. But the other players were right there on hand, too. Probably the guy got lost in the rough, like dubs usually do, and the rest of them waited for him on the green and then when he didn't come they started back."

"Giving each other a perfect alibi, or something?"

"Look," said Piper. "I'm only a working cop, *not* a crystal-gazer."

"True. Oscar, let's *us* go out to the scene of the crime."

"*What* crime? Remember, we don't know there's a crime. And the skipper of Homicide can't go bursting out on every minor beef—"

"No, the big man is supposed

to sit here and do his paperwork nicely and neatly!"

"Hildegarde, why are you so set on making anything but a freak accident out of this? Sergeant Donovan knows his business." Just then the phone shrilled. "Say, that could be him now!"

"*He!*" whispered Miss Withers, then stopped to listen.

"Yes, sergeant," Oscar Piper was saying. "What? Well, why is the body still there? I don't get it. Oh—the medical examiner said *that*, eh? Well, if the stiff has laid there this long, keep hands off until I get there. Understand? *Okay!*"

The Inspector put down the phone, and for once, he was awed. "You're right on one point, Hildegarde—but for the wrong reasons. The medical examiner says its murder, and they've gone ahead and arrested the dead man's son!" He grabbed for his hat. "Come on, then, since I see that you are going to insist on kibitsing anyway." She was already going through the door ahead of him, jamming her fantastic hat a little lower on her head. The thrill of the chase showed in the widening of her nostrils, and she gripped the Inspector's arm, hard.

"Oscar, I don't believe it was the son who did it!"

"No. With you it always has to be the *least*-likely suspect!"

They climbed into a long black squad-car, and then the screaming of sirens and the roar of a hundred-horse-power motor drowned out further conversation. Through Manhattan's traffic, across the 59th Street Bridge, then through the vast, crowded emptiness of Queens, on and on, for what seemed forever. Then they turned off the boulevard and swung south over a narrow macadam road and at last glimpsed a somewhat faded sign, "Meadowland Golf Course — Public — Greens Fee $2.50." Across the fence they could see a rolling expanse of what probably had been not long ago a useful hayfield, now plentifully overgrown with brush, and with here and there a clipped green square of carpet, plus a weathered flag on a pole, to indicate that the area was now hopefully dedicated to cow-pasture pool.

The sirens died as the police car found its way down the side road. Silence fell—comparative silence, anyway. But Miss Withers' voice went right on as if she had never been interrupted at all, "—and of course the very *idea* of patricide is distasteful to everyone . . ."

"It happens every now and then," said the Inspector. The road wound up a small hill—and then their travel was interrupted by a uniformed figure which stepped out into the road ahead of them, frantically waving its arms. Brakes howled.

"If you're Inspector Piper, the sergeant says I was to tell you if you leave the car here and cut through the fence it will save you about a mile walk," announced the man in the ditch. "The place where it happened is over that rise and down the the gully, under them big maples."

"Okay," said Piper. He helped Miss Withers out of the car (which was easy), and through the barb-wire fence (which was fraught with difficulties and peril). They were guided across a greenish expanse of fairway, over a little hill, and down again. Ahead of them, from the depths of a narrow ravine that angled across the field like a scar, rose the tops of a cluster of tallish trees.

"*Basswood*, not maple," said Miss Withers, quietly. They came out suddenly on the lip of the ravine, looking down on a wide, leaf-choked pond.

The official circle of inquiry was there, and the center of everything was a formless shape partly covered by a tarpaulin. A photographer was taking pictures, and everybody else seemed to be just standing around, waiting for something to happen.

A red-faced perspiring detective in a tweed suit came quickly up to meet them, and saluted. Since both he and the Inspector were in plain clothes, the salute was out of order—but Oscar Piper let it go by. "Well?" he said.

"Glad you got here, sir. The medical examiner finally got finished and left, but I wouldn't let them move the body until you came. It's an open-and-shut case, if you *ast* me. . . ."

"Open, yes. But shut—I wonder!" put in Miss Withers.

"Howdy, ma'am," said Sergeant Donovan coldly. "Didn't see you at first. Now you understand, Inspector—"

"Let's have a look," said Piper, cutting the man short. They looked at the body, hastily uncovered for their benefit—a sprawled, plumpish middle-aged man lying face down, arms akimbo, wearing natty checked plus-fours and a bright yellow-plaid sweater. You had to bend down very close to see the wound at the back of the skull.

"He looks sorta surprised!" observed the Inspector. "Well, I guess that's it. He's been here long enough. Get the wagon."

"The guy who owns the place, name of Thorr, won't let *anybody* drive out on the course. Says it's wet and cars will cut it all up."

"Get the wagon, anyway." Piper scowled.

"Wait, Oscar!" Miss Withers was worried. "What about the murder weapon, or was that forever lost in the shuffle?"

"Oh, I almost forgot!" spoke

up Donovan hastily. "That's where!" He pointed to a copper penny someone had put down to indicate the exact spot, about three feet from the corpse, where the offending golf ball had lain. "I got it right here!" From his shirt pocket he took a wadded handkerchief, opening it to show a bright new golf ball. Above the manufacturer's trade-mark someone had printed a tiny black spade. The other side of the ball, Miss Withers saw, bore a dull brownish smear. "Exhibit A, Inspector," said Donovan, almost triumphantly.

"Okay," said Piper. "Come on, Hildegarde. We might as well move on to the clubhouse."

But Miss Withers had discovered a dead branch from the tree, with which she was poking somewhat dubiously at the pool. "*Okay*, we've found everything," he told her sharply. "Or is your suspect a mermaid?"

"It's *deep*," she observed quietly, and tossed aside the branch. It was a good stiff walk back to the main building, a smallish shack which had probably begun life as a barn or a chicken-coop. In front was an office, furnished with a jittery young female clerk, a cash-register, a counter displaying sun-caps, goggles, golf balls and tees and the like, also bottled pop and cigarettes. There was also a screened porch boasting a few tables with staggered chairs, obviously not much used.

It was in the semi-privacy of this porch that the prisoner was being temporarily held, with a plainclothes detective on either side and a burly lieutenant in charge. The boy should have been taken in and booked an hour or so ago, but evidently the officers were being wary. Young Ronald Farling was slumped disconsolately in a folding-chair, staring at nothing—and not too aware of his legal rights, Miss Withers felt.

It was the officer in charge who fended them off at the door. "Glad you made it, Inspector."

"Yeah," said Piper coldly. "Miss Withers—this is Lieutenant Mike Platt, Queens Division. So you're up for congratulations, Mike?"

Platt burgeoned. "Glad that you agree the case is busted quick, Inspector. But still I kept the guy here so you could talk to him."

"Okay. Give me the picture," said Piper, now very professional.

"It's not a very nice one, believe me! This guy Farling and his son Ronald, together with Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Firth, all came out here this morning for a round of golf. Seems they often play this little nine-hole course because it's never crowded, and still fairly close to the city. We already got statements from Firth and Sullivan and let them go. No angles. Seems the day

started out like any day. On the seventh hole the older men got off to bad drives on a hole that's more rough than fairway, anyway, to get set right for an approach shot you have to have a long drive—"

"Save it," said Piper. "Rotation-pool is my game."

"Anyway, Inspector, none of the men were using caddies, they lugged their own clubs. So after they drove offen the tee, they went off in separate directions. Only young Farling had had a good sensible drive. Sullivan landed in the trees. Firth went off into the rough on the other side, and Farling topped his tee-shot and dribbled it only twenty feet or so. The others went on and left him, because he was usually only a dub-golfer anyway. From that moment until the foursome (or what was left of it) got together on the green, each man was separate and busy with his own affairs. Though nobody saw him, Farling must have hit his second or third shot over onto the other fairway, and then whacked another into the water-hazard. So he went after it, but the water's too deep for wading. He must have been looking for his ball when somebody else accidentally drove right into the back of his head—"

Miss Hildegrade Withers was listening to all this with an unaccustomed silence. Through the porch screen she could see the drawn and haggard face of the young captive, this young Farling, who was supposed to be, as the police said, "good for it." He didn't look like a murderer to her, but of course, they *never* did!

"When Mr. Farling didn't show up at the green to putt out with the others, they got worried and went back yelling his name and all that sort of thing—" the cop was continuing.

"Okay," said Piper. "Who *actually* found the man?"

"Thorr, the greenskeeper. He *says!* But he saw Ronald Farling almost at the same moment. And there were other members of the foursome pretty close. And, if we figure right, Ronald found his father because he damn well knew where to look!"

"Yeah. But what exactly was the greenskeeper doing out there?"

"Well, he'd heard the shouting. He was over on the fairway, cutting and raking up Canada thistles, and they're the worst kind. Seems like the guy tries to do all the work of keeping up the place himself. A crusty old character, but well-liked locally."

"Go on," said Piper. "What you actually got on the kid?"

"Plenty, Inspector. Because he had a hell of a fight with his father yesterday in the office, over something he wanted to do and the old man wouldn't let him do. 'Not while I live!' the

old man yelled at the top of his voice and Firth, his law-partner heard it. But the boy won't say what the argument was about. Probably money. It usually is."

"Money is the root of all evil, as the Good Book says," the Inspector nodded wisely.

But Miss Withers sniffed again. "The quotation is incorrect, and so, I think, is the hypothesis."

"There's more!" said Lieutenant Platt defensively. "The kid is what they call a *scratch* golfer. Could be a pro, maybe, if he worked at it. He likes to give exhibitions of driving a golf ball off the face of a watch, or taking a mashie and driving balls into a tin pail from twenty paces. He's probably one of the few guys around who could be pretty sure of hitting what he aimed at with a golf club, even if it was the back of somebody's head!"

"It all begins to make sense to me," said the Inspector. "Eh, Hildegarde?"

"No!" she said. "There are too many holes in this glib theory. The thing could have been an accident. Some golfer could have hit a wild shot, and then naturally been reluctant to admit it!"

"But nobody else was playing right on that part of the golf course!" put in Platt.

"And Mr. Thorr himself must have had a lot of time to practice?"

"He doesn't even *pretend* to play golf! No ma'am, we've got the right guy."

"It is amazing to me," said the schoolteacher sweetly, "that you haven't also got a confession. Or does that come later, when you get him in the back room with the length of rubber hose?"

"Un-lax, Hildegarde!" snapped the Inspector. He turned. "Okay, I'll have a word with the lad."

They went up the steps and onto the porch. The pale young suspect seemed to be rigidly in control of himself, but his light blue sports-shirt was stained with sweat. He tried to stand up, against the restraint of the officers.

"How long are you going to try to hold me here?" he demanded. "Look, I've told you I had nothing to do with what happened to him! Sure we had arguments. Plenty. Who doesn't? But do you think I'd kill my own father—?"

"Father by adoption, was it not?" put in Miss Withers quietly. "I seem to remember something in the papers. . . . ?"

Ronald Farling stopped short, his eyes cloudy. "Yes, by adoption! The Farlings, mother and dad—she was alive then—adopted me twelve years ago, when I was nine. It was just after—well—"

"Go on," said Piper.

"Just—" the boy gulped. "Just after my real father was executed for murder! Dan Farling was the defense attorney, but he couldn't

get my dad off, though it all happened in a roughhouse—a battle between company goon-squads and union men trying to strike. I was too young to know much about it—"

"But you did know that your natural father died fighting for what he thought was right!" put in Miss Withers. "For the rights of the worker, the underdog!" She was jubilant.

"No, ma'am. It happens that my father was boss of the *goon*-squad!" There was a silence. "Well," the young man continued, "Dan Farling knew that when my father was executed I was due for an orphanage, so he took me and swore to bring me up as his own son, which he *did*."

"And you paid him back *real nice*," cut in Lieutenant Platt hastily. "Like father, like son."

The boy had nothing to say to that. "Okay," said the Inspector, wearily. "You can't deny you had a fight with Farling yesterday in the office. You might as well tell the rest of it, right now."

"It wasn't a fight. It was an argument."

"Arguments have to be about something!"

"Well, he didn't want me to get married," confessed the young man simply. "He didn't want me to quit college over a girl. And if you want to know the name of the girl you can rot in hell before I tell you and drag her into this!" He subsided sullenly into his chair and shook his head at all further questions.

Miss Withers got bored and left, planning to do a little quiet snooping of her own nearby. Soon she reappeared with a worn leather golf-bag in hand. The initials on the bag were "*RF*." "This is yours?" she asked the suspect-prisoner. He nodded. She opened the zipper pocket and brought out half a dozen golf balls. Three were battered, the others spic-and-span new—except that one showed a few minor nicks. Each bore a tiny red heart above the trademark. "Could I see the one that's being held as the murder weapon?" she demanded. "Ah, just as I thought! They do *not* match!" On an impulse she showed Ronald Farling the ball with the smear of blood. "Do you recognize this ball, young man?"

"Sure. That's my father's."

The officers gathered closer. "What's this?" Lieutenant Platt demanded.

"Sure it's his," said Ronald. "When we started out this morning, each member of the foursome bought a box of four balls. Ask Molly—the young lady inside at the counter! Of course we each got a different color and mark so we could tell them apart. The manufacturers make them that way . . . in matching sets. Firth took clubs, Sullivan diamonds, my father picked spades.

So that left hearts for me. Sullivan kidded me about it, me supposedly at the age for that love stuff!" The young man smiled bitterly.

"So David Farling was killed with one of his own golf balls!" said Miss Withers. "That certainly knocks the accident theory out!" Can we compare this with the other balls in his bag?"

The dead man's bag was produced, but it was empty of balls. "This isn't getting us anywheres," stated Lieutenant Platt. "Okay for me to take the prisoner back and book him, Inspector?"

"It's your bailiwick," said Piper, "But I'd suggest you book him as a material witness until you get an autopsy report. And go easy with the rough stuff, understand?" he added, mostly for the benefit of Miss Withers.

The prisoner was led away toward a police runabout, but the school-teacher found it hard to forget the dazed yet belligerent expression on his hard young face. He was frightened —but he was *something else* too!

There was a brief interlude during which finally a gray ambulance roared out into the gathering darkness, its lights shining like two glaring tiger-eyes. At long last David Farling was to be removed from the edge of the muddy pool.

The Inspector said he ought to call into his office, and Miss Withers wandered idly out and around the place. The proprietor might have a good name with his neighbors, but he was a poor housekeeper. Around in back was a literal junkyard, a mess of old automobile tires, soggy paper cartons, empty pop and beer bottles, rusty and broken tools and even the box the coke machine on the porch had been delivered in long ago, leaning drunkenly erect like a mummy-case or upended coffin! The schoolteacher passed the side of the building where there were living quarters (judging by the garbage cans) and came out on the first tee of the golf course, where the view was considerably more inspiring.

She found a player's bench and sat down. There was more to this mystery, she felt, than met the eye. How she wished she had taken up games and sports in her younger days; a knowledge of golf would be a great help now! She had a feeling that the one essential clue was eluding her—and the police too. Far away she could see the lights of the morgue wagon swing against the sky as it turned around to head back, presumably with passenger.

"A ride each one of us must take, and some before our time," she mused.

She started as a voice from the shadows answered her—or seemed to answer. But it was a mumbled torrent of words which made no sense. She turned and

saw the hulking form of a man in overalls, a man in his fifties, looking not at her, but off into the distance. He was speaking in German with an Italian accent, or French with a German accent and she could just about make out the word, "*Schwein*".

At once she guessed who *this* must be. Well, there was much to be said for the value of a surprise-attack, and perhaps she could get something from this witness that the police had not. She jumped up like a jack-in-the-box and confronted him.

"Who are *you?*" she demanded in her best schoolteacherish voice.

"Who am I?" he cried furiously. "*She* asks *me*, who *I* am? Me, I'm nobody but old man Thorr, good old Chris Thorr, who tries to make a living, slaving all day and all night to make smooth the grass and keep down the weeds—and now look!" He pointed to the tire tracks in the grass. "See where the pigs go joy-riding in their *verdammte* ambulance?"

His voice broke. Miss Withers, who in her day had tried to maintain a dichondra lawn in front of her cottage, felt a certain sympathy, especially now that the ambulance came lurching back toward them, right across the putting green where it stuck for a moment, spinning wheels kicking mud and grass high in the air. Thorr turned aside, muttering. "*Es is nicht der Muhe Wert!*" The door slammed behind him.

Miss Withers turned to see that the Inspector was beside her. "What was that last crack?" he asked.

"Mr. Thorr says that life is just a bowl of cherries," Miss Withers translated rather freely. "I'm afraid he's a pessimist."

"From what I hear, he's got reasons. He turned his farm into a golf course and it barely makes expenses. Who'd pay a two fifty greens-fee nowadays except a millionaire, and that kind go elsewhere. Next year they're going to run a new parkway right through the place, ruining it for golf, and his wife ran off with a traveling salesman a couple months ago. . . ."

"I noticed he has a girl in the office," said Miss Withers casually. "Not exactly homely, either."

"Sure. That's Molly Gargan, a neighbor girl he hires to take the money and sell pop and stuff, while he's out trying to keep up the place. Which reminds me, I better tell the local boys it's okay for her to go home. We've been holding everybody—"

"Except the ones who count, Mr. Donovan and Mr. Firth!"

"We can't hold men of that prominence, Hildegarde. They made their statements, and they won't run away."

"And Molly might? By the

way, I'd like a word with her." Molly was well worth a word, or even more. Beauty, of course, was only skin-deep. The schoolteacher had immediate suspicions that this girl with the black curls and bright blue eyes, who possessed also more than her fair share of curves, *knew* something. A girl who looked like that would just have to be mixed up in anything that happened nearby, from the very nature of things!

Now the girl sat at a stool behind the counter, staring out the window. Her face was calm, too calm to be in harmony with the tears that slid unnoticed down her cheeks. She wore a modest dress, probably home-made, and as she sat there, Molly's fingers, like meddlesome strangers, carefully tore little zigzags in the lace of her collar.

"Ahem!" said Miss Withers. "Now young lady, what happened out there to a customer on the golf course can't really affect you, can it?"

"Of course not," agreed Molly through tight lips.

"The young man they arrested," Miss Withers went on," said they *all* purchased balls here this morning. Is that right?"

Molly was on the defensive. "Of course it's right!"

"And all four of them bought balls marked with a little red diamond, just alike. Is that true?"

Molly didn't bat an eye. "Yes, that's right," she swore. "I remember it perfectly."

"Like fun you do," the schoolteacher said under her breath. But she had learned one thing anyway. "Where do you live, Molly?"

"If it's any of your business, I live up the road about a mile. My father keeps a gas station there."

"Very well. The Inspector asked me to tell you you can go home now."

"*Thanks!*" said Molly fervently. With one quick motion she pulled on a sweater and was out the door. Before she was out of sight she was running.

"Gone off again without locking up the register!" growled Chris Thorr, who seemed to have a way of walking up on people —with silent feet. "*Women!*" he said. Then he rang the bell, scooped up the day's take and relaxed a little. "Business wasn't so bad today, after all," he admitted. "Thought the cops were helping themselves to pop and stuff, but she musta made them pay for it, after all."

"That girl, with her hair and eyes could make men jump through hoops," observed Miss Withers.

"Molly, she's pretty enough," Thorr went on. "But the prettier they are the less work you can get outa 'em. Soon as she gets herself married I'm gonna hire a good sober girl, homely as a

mud fence." He went around turning off lights. "You going home now, huh? I think your boy-friend, he's waiting in his car."

"He's not, either!" she snapped. But she gave in, and went home; everybody went home—except for one solitary cop who had been assigned, in accordance with Lieutenant Platt's conception of proper procedure, to cover the scene of the crime. Patrolman Walter Fogle spread out a newspaper on the damp grass under the maple trees, (or maybe they *were* basswood, as Miss Withers had said) and prepared for a lonely vigil by the side of the dark leaf-choked pool.

Fogle, a quiet man, would ordinarily have preferred sitting *anywhere* to walking a beat. But this was *not* one of his favorite spots. He had no faith whatever in the theory that the murderer returns to the scene of the crime. The wind howled eerily and the pale October moon was hidden behind ragged wisps of clouds. He realized that it lacked but a night or two of being Halloween, which set him thinking in wrong directions—about witches and goblins and such.

Not that he believed in such foolishment, really. . . . But he must have dozed off and then suddenly wakened with a jerk to see a spectral white figure moving near the water's edge. Fogle blinked, pinched himself and blinked again. But the indistinct figure remained. It moved!

"Hey!" he shouted through dry and trembling lips.

The white figure became a statue.

"What the hell are you doing there?" demanded the patrolman, trying to scramble to his feet, on legs that were still asleep. "Stop or I'll fire!"

The apparition dissolved in the direction of the shrubbery silently as a ghost. Fogle wasn't entirely sure that it wasn't a ghost, but he blazed away with his pistol, which had no effect at all—except that it somewhat relieved his mind.

Next morning, shamefaced, he made the necessary report to Lieutenant Platt, who said he ought to have his head examined. "Maybe it wasn't a ghost, and maybe it wasn't anything," insisted Officer Fogle. "But one thing, it could disappear like a rabbit. And if I hadn't waked up when I did—"

"Oh, *asleep,* were you? Go on."

"Well, I know it *wasn't* Chris Thorr nosing around, because I went right away up to his shack and dragged him out of bed to make sure. He was *sound* asleep! And there was a heavy dew last night, but his shoes weren't wet. . . ."

"Nice work. You can go home now. . . ."

"Gee, *thanks*, Lieutenant!"

". . . and get washed up and shaved and put on a uniform that hasn't been slept in, because I'm giving you extra duty. *Asleep*, yet!"

Meanwhile back at Centre Street, Miss Withers and the Inspector were in a huddle. "Funny about the autopsy report," he said. "The doc says Farling's skull was of normal thickness, and that a golf ball would have to be travelling like a bullet to make such a wound!"

"Oscar, could you shoot a golf ball out of a gun, a big one?"

He grinned. "Even if you could improvise such a gun out of a piece of pipe, the answer is *no*. There'd be powder burns on the ball and the sound would be heard for miles. The autopsy shows that while the ball bears traces of the same type blood as Farling's, it has never even once been struck by a golf club! Except for the smear, it's as fresh as when it came outa the box!"

Miss Withers frowned. "I only suggested the home-made gun because I spent two hours this morning taking a golf lesson from a pro out at the Garden City Public course. The pro there is a better golfer than even young Farling and he can drive a ball nearly 400 yards on a good day and he can lift one neatly onto a target twenty feet away, *but not both at the same time*, Oscar!" She sniffed triumphantly. "In other words you *can't* combine great speed and *exact* accuracy. So Roland Farling didn't kill his adopted father, at least not the way you think he did."

"Then we're right back where we started," said Piper slowly.

She shook her head. "We've eliminated some things, which is all to the good. Oscar, I think we're trying to make this case too complicated. The important thing right now is *where* and *when*? Why would *anybody* want to kill a man right in broad daylight on the golf course with other players around? And why right by the pool?"

"That's your question, you answer it."

"And did you ever get the report from the telephone company?"

He shook his head. "Not yet. Takes them time to trace those long distance calls. But I don't think we'd learn anything if we did find out how many phone calls, if any, have been made from the clubhouse to Farling's office in Manhattan, or vice versa. I don't see the direction of your thinking—"

She smiled. "You rarely do. But when there's a girl as startlingly beautiful as Molly Gargan in a case, you can take it for granted that *somehow* she fits into the picture!"

"Hildegarde, you've been going to those romantic movies again. Yeah, I suppose Farling

could have been playing way out there on that little nine-hole golf course just to see the fair Molly every day, had got involved with her and wanted to cast her adrift, only she cast first. Or suppose Thorr was in love with Molly and blew his top at the idea of her playing with a guy from the city?. . . ."

"Oscar, be sensible. Thorr isn't in love with the girl, he *wouldn't* be in love with any woman who wasn't the hardworking, peasant type. And Farling *wouldn't* have brought his son and friends along if he was courting the girl, nor have gone there any more if he had decided to ditch her. Of course, we are both pointedly ignoring the fact that if Molly is mixed up with anyone in the case, it is—"

Just then the phone rang and Piper listened eagerly, making notes on a slip of paper. "Well," he said, when he had hung up. "The operator out on Long Island gave me some dope, anyway. Molly has been getting and making a lot of long-distance calls into town this last month, but not to Farling's office—to his *home!*"

"Interesting, Oscar. But don't go trying to pin the murder on Ronald Farling, just yet. Because he couldn't have been the midnight prowler who frightened Patrolman Fogle out of his alleged wits last night, not if you have Ronald firmly in jail."

"I *don't* believe Fogle actually saw anybody—he just dreamed it!"

"Oscar, I think you ought to order that pool drained!"

"Hey, isn't *one* body enough for you?"

"I was thinking not so much of a body as of another golf ball," she said. "One with specks of powder on it, and a trademark which might be anything *but* a black spade!"

"Draining that pool would be something of an engineering problem," he told her sensibly. "And it's probably a foot deep with old golf balls."

"Then I suggest you turn young Farling loose, because there's a lot more to be learned from him free, than if he's in jail."

"The more we discover, the worse off we are," Piper objected. "It seems Sullivan has been giving Farling political hell over the radio and there is really a sort of armed neutrality between them—they play golf only to needle each other. As for Sam Firth, he inherits both halves of a very lucrative law business. . . ."

"*Business! Politics!*" snapped Miss Withers. "You're missing the key to this whole affair. I wish I knew more about Molly Gargan. I believe she's the catalytic—"

"Come now, she looks too healthy to throw any fits!"

"I said *'catalytic,'* not *'epileptic'!* But I tell you she knows something! I'm going to telephone her and arrange for a quiet little talk—"

She called the golf club office, but the phone was answered by Chris Thorr himself. "*Nein,* she not show up today. No business anyway, except sightseers and they spend notting."

The schoolteacher hung up and tried again, this time through Information, which gave her the number of Gargan's filling-station. She listened (very quietly for her) to the excited accents of the voice which finally answered. When she had hung up, she turned to the Inspector. "That was Molly's father," she said. "Molly isn't there. She left very early this morning, without saying goodbye. She didn't take a suitcase and she was wearing just a pink dress, her father thinks."

"Flight is a sign of a guilty conscience," said the Inspector.

"Oscar, listen! Doesn't pink look white at night?" She gave him no time to answer. "Come on! I think we're on the trail of something. And I don't like the scent!"

"But listen to me. I can't leave my desk—" he protested.

"Then bring it with you! Oscar, I have a hunch!" So, remembering some other hunches she'd had, Oscar Piper gave in and followed her. But he had to stop in first at the morning lineup, and then there was a delay in getting a squad car, and finally a traffic tieup on the Bridge.

"The girl is probably at the jail where they're holding Ronald Farling, trying to see him. If we can only get there first and have a talk with him . . . ?"

The talk with young Farling, they found out when they reached the Queens lockup, would have to be indefinitely postponed. "He's flew the coop!" was the way Lieutenant Platt put it.

"You mean he busted *out?*" Piper was furious.

"Oh no, sir. But about an hour ago Sam Firth, who was Farling's law partner, remember, came with a writ of *habeas corpus.* He'd got wind of the medical examiner's report, which cast doubt on the golf ball angle. So it was up to me to book the kid then and there for murder or else turn him loose. What else could I do? I tried to phone you, but you weren't in."

"Okay, okay!" said the Inspector. "It doesn't make any real difference. We can always pick him up if we need him."

"We need him right *now!*" said Miss Withers. "First the girl turns up missing, and now Ronald. We're running out of suspects. What's the situation out at the golf course today, lieutenant?" She tapped her teeth

with a fingernail. "Is *anybody* there?"

"Why—yes, ma'am. We've got Samuels on duty at the scene of the crime now and Fogle's to replace him in a few minutes. Like it says in regulations. . . ."

"What edition of Regulations do you use, 1915?" asked Piper. "Oh, skip it. Well, Hildegarde, are we through here?"

"Take me over to the golf course," she demanded. "There's something I have to check on. And for heaven's sake, this time *no sirens.*"

They approached Meadowland very quietly indeed, and at Miss Withers' instigation the car was again parked down the road. The Inspector looked blank. "You mean we got to crawl through the fence and hike all over the country again?" She nodded grimly. "Good lord, woman, you seem fascinated by that pool!"

"Hardly. But I want a description from Fogle of that ghost he saw."

They tramped across hill and dale and finally came to the water-hazard under the basswood trees, but Fogle was *not* on duty. Another uniformed man came militantly out of the underbrush to bar their way, and then stopped and saluted, when he saw who it was. "Samuels, sir."

"I thought Fogle was supposed to be here?"

"Hasn't relieved me yet. I guess last night was too much for him, because he was due at two o'clock, and it's twenty past."

"What were you doing off the post, looking for him?"

"No, Inspector," the cop flushed, "Thought I saw something moving in there—"

Piper shook his head. "I guess all you men out here believe in fairies and such," he growled. "Was it a big *bad* hobgoblin?"

"No, sir," said the officer seriously. "I finally flushed him out. It was a young guy in golf-clothes, and he could run like a deer."

"I'll bet!" said Piper. "Probably just a curiosity seeker, looking for souvenirs."

But Miss Withers, who had climbed up to the bank of the gully, was staring out over the distant fairway. "He still *is!* Running like a deer, I mean. Back toward our car. And if he doesn't look out—" Piper and the cop joined her just in time to get a clear, if distant, view of a young man (who looked like Ronald Farling) as he vaulted the wire fence into the highway and was immediately flagged down and taken into custody by the driver of the police car.

"He thought we'd left the car alone and was going to try and grab!" said Piper and set out at a run. He was ahead by six lengths in the stretch, but they

came up to the wire neck-and-neck, Miss Withers winning by a nose.

Ronald Farling was arguing furiously with his captors. "Leave him go!" cried the Inspector. "There's no charge against this man."

Ronald looked somewhat the worse for wear after his night in jail, and could have used a shave and a comb. "I suppose you want to know why I'm here?" he demanded.

Miss Withers shook her head. "You're looking for the same thing we are," she said. "Come with us, if you wish. In the words of the popular song, we're heading for the last roundup!"

Leaving the car and driver where they were, the three then hurried toward the clubhouse along the side of the road, keeping behind trees and shrubbery when they could, Miss Withers leading the way. "Why the sneak approach?" the breathless Inspector wanted to know.

"I hear voices," she whispered. "And I'd rather nobody heard ours."

The wind blew lustily from the north, driving dead leaves into their faces, and carrying now the loud sound of argument from somewhere behind the clubhouse. They crept stealthily on, and finally came up to the shadow of a hedge, which gave them a vantage point overlooking the littered yard in the rear of the building. Chris Thorr stood there, raking away at the refuse. He was talking to somebody behind the fuselage of an abandoned Model-T Ford.

"Vell then, I bet you twenty dollars against five you can't hit the bullseye in one out of three tries!" the angry old Swiss was insisting. His voice sounded oddly excited.

Officer Fogle appeared from behind the ancient car, threw down a cigarette and slowly drew out his service pistol. "You talk too much, Dutchman," he said. "I hate to do it, taking your money like this—"

The two men were standing about twenty feet away from the abandoned case Miss Withers had noticed last night, the one originally made to hold the pop-machine. Now she saw with surprise that a home-made target of black and white circles had been tacked on the side of the plywood box.

"There's my money!" said Chris Thorr, and laid it on the fender of the old car.

"Okay!" agreed Fogle. "I got three tries to put a slug in the center of that target. Right?" He put down his money and raised his gun.

Miss Withers tried to scream, but no sound came from her throat. She grabbed the Inspector's arm and gestured wildly. "*Stop* him!" she whispered in a dry croak.

"Hey!" shouted Oscar Piper. Both men turned, paralyzed. "Illegal target practice within the city limits of New York, unauthorized use of service gun—what the hell do you think you're doing, Fogle?" He strode firmly forward.

"I—I'm sorry, sir. But there's no harm in it. We got no pistol range and we have to get in some practice now and then. But he was razzing me about my markmanship. On account of my firing last night at the ghost, or whatever it was. Claimed I couldn't even hit the packing case over there, so we made a little bet. . . ."

"Oh, this wise guy thinks policemen can't shoot, eh?" Piper cocked his head.

"*Ja!*" cried Thorr. "Couldn't hit a barn, none of you, if you were inside it with the doors shut. Not like the *polizie* in *Schwetzerland*, let me tell you!"

"Inspector, I know I'm on duty in a coupla minutes, but couldn't I just this once . . . ?"

"Go ahead and show the wise guy," said the Inspector. "I'll forget the regulations."

"You can forget the regulations and you can *forget the common sense God gave geese. But first* let *me* look into that packing case!" cried Miss Withers, and before anyone could stop her, she had rushed forward, planting herself right in front of the target, tearing at the case with tooth and nail, or very nearly. But it had been hammered shut.

"Hildegarde, have you gone out of your mind?"

"Help me, somebody! Doesn't it occur to you to wonder *why* that man wants this box shot into?" It was young Ronald Farling who came forward to help her, while Thorr and the officers looked blankly on. At last a board came loose, then another . . .

"Oh, God!" cried Ronald. "It's *Molly!*"

It *was* Molly Gargan, tied hand and foot and gagged with dirty rags—a wriggling, furious, helpless Molly—whose heart was beating just behind the bullseye of the target. Tenderly they helped her out.

"*She'll* keep!" screamed Miss Withers. "Get that man!"

Gnarled, dried-up Chris Thorr had suddenly come alive. He flung Officer Fogle head over heels, knocked the Inspector to his knees with a vicious blow from the rake in his hand, and now he was running at Molly, his mouth open and dribbling, mumbling obscenities . . .

The rake whistled through the air—and Ronald Farling dodged the iron teeth, stepped in sharply and drove first one fist and then the other low into the greenskeeper's belly. It was nothing, Miss Withers realized, like the movies, nothing at all. This was over in seconds, and Chris Thorr

was counted out, from two low punches. Ronald had to be prevented from also kicking him in the face, but Miss Withers was inclined to sympathize with him, even in that.

Molly didn't faint, either. She grabbed Ronald and hung on to him as if she never intended to let him go.

The Inspector finally managed to relight his cigar, after the dust had settled. "Is this a nut-house?" he wanted to know.

"Not *quite,* Oscar," said Miss Withers. "But I'd better fill you in before the reporters get here. Thorr wanted to get Molly put out of the way, and his devious mind chose this method. Fogle was to have shot her as she huddled tied and gagged in that box, all quite innocently. Then later Mr. Thorr would have moved the body out on the golf course somewhere—and with a couple of bullets from a policeman's gun in her body, Fogle would be the one to be suspected, and everybody would think he really hit the 'ghost' last night."

"But Hildegarde, I don't—"

"The *ghost,* of course, was Thorr himself, probably in his night-shirt, and barefoot!" she went on. "He didn't know there'd be a guard at the water-hazard, and he had some unfinished business there."

"But why would he want to kill Molly anyway?"

"Because the girl's no fool, and she suspected why he had to kill Dave Farling! When her lover was arrested for the murder, she started asking questions and sleuthing around. She'd seen brownish stains on the end of that rake handle—"

"How do you know all this?" he demanded. "Another hunch?"

"No, she told me just now, before Ronald took her away. Don't you see? The *rake* was the murder weapon, not the golf ball."

"Crazier and crazier! What possible motive would he have to kill Farling?"

"A pretty good one. The pool comes into it again. Farling must have been looking for a lost golf ball and poked into that water with a long branch, just as I did later. And Thorr, who had his own reasons for keeping an eye on the pool, saw it and rushed in to stop the exploration, and when he got close he hurled his rake like a javelin! The rake handle, at its end, is the same diameter as a golf ball, Oscar. He thought of that when he'd finished the deed; so he took the one remaining ball from his victim's bag, touched it to the wound, and dropped it nearby. Incidentally he dropped it much too close—if a hard-hit golf drive had really hit a man's skull it would have ricocheted for a much farther distance."

"Hildegarde, this is all nonsense. Why in the name of heaven, should Thorr object to having anybody poke around in that pool?"

"Your guess, Oscar, is as good as mine," Miss Withers said. "We won't know for sure until you drain or drag the pool, but I have an idea you might find the body of the wife who was supposed to have run away with a travelling salesman some weeks ago."

"My gosh, who'd have thought of that!" gasped the Inspector.

"Who indeed?" Miss Withers said very sweetly.

ROSA RICCOBONO

The story of Rosa Riccobono, referred to on p.52 of this issue, is the story of the women of Sicily who, up to recently, have done much more than the authorities in the years-long fight against the all-pervasive influence of the Mafia. Trade Union circles and others in Sicily have "questioned" the seriousness of the Government's Commission of Inquiry into the Mafia; these women have done more than this—they have acted. These are formidable women—women such as Abbazia's mother in Cornell Woolrich's THE NIGHT OF FEBBRUARY 17th in our October 1963 issue—single-minded and uncompromising once aroused. And relentless.

In 1955, Francesca Serio denounced four *mafiosi* for killing her son, the young peasant leader Carnevale, the 38th trade unionist to be killed in Sicily in less than ten years. Bribery and threats were useless and at their trial, five years later, her testimony helped to convict the four who were given life imprisonment. Her village remains in Mafia territory.

In November, 1957, Rosa Riccobono's husband, a forest guardian, refused to allow a local Mafia family to run stolen cattle across his land. He was killed. A son avenged the death—and is now in prison. Two other sons have died since then; the youngest, a thirteen year old shepherd, was shot down in 1961. The two surviving children (as in the case of the young Marco Ponti) had to be sent away. And *then* Rosa Riccobono talked. . . .

In December, 1962, Rosa Riccobono denounced the *mafiosi* who ruled the village of Tommaso Natale. When she was through, twenty-nine arrests had been made. Another blow had been struck against *omertà*, the code of silence under which both *mafiosi* and their victims had lived for so long.

the case of the common cold

by Craig Rice

There are plenty of doctors who will tell you—"You don't catch cold from getting your feet wet." Opinions differ. Frankly—I don't know. But the young man in this story not only caught a cold, but, because he did get his feet wet, he caught a conviction for a brutal murder, and a life sentence.

It was a cool October night in 1943. Mrs. Walter Reiman waited anxiously in the pleasant little Reiman ranch house near Pendleton, Oregon.

Dinner was still waiting on the table. Cold, by this time. More than three hours had gone by since the search had begun for her sixteen year old daughter, June.

For the hundredth time she told herself there was no need to worry. June was a crack shot, trained by her father in the expert use of a rifle since she was a very small child. She'd gone out carrying her rifle, with the intention of shooting some rabbits.

Only it wasn't like June to stay away longer than she had planned!

I think it was Tony Boucher who once asked, in the New York Times Book Review, *"Why can't all murders be as funny as those concocted by Craig Rice?" Craig Rice was a very genuine and a very real person in many ways. She and John J. Malone are so much a part of our memories that we forget that she also wrote about the America many of us know.*

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The anxious mother reminded herself of what June's father had said. "She'll be all right. She knows every inch of the country around here, and she can take care of herself. Don't worry, she'll be home soon."

But hours had gone by, and there was still no word.

Footsteps outside! Before the anxious mother could reach the door, it was flung open. It was Walter Reiman, with several of the neighbors who had been searching, with him, for the missing girl.

"*June—?*"

Reiman sank down in a chair. His white, haggard face was enough to tell her the terrible news.

One of the neighbors said, "*He*—found her."

Mrs. Reiman gasped, clutched the edge of a table for support. "A hunting accident?"

Her husband looked up, shook his head. "No. I wish it had been. It was—murder!"

He couldn't believe it himself. True, he had been anxious about his adored daughter since his wife had told him that she had not returned from her rabbit hunting excursion. He'd called up the nearest neighbors, including the Elder family, to ask if anyone who lived near the creek June had intended to follow had seen anything of her.

At last he'd made a few phone calls, and some twenty or more men and boys from the neighborhood had organized a search. They followed the woods along the creek, since that was where Reiman reasoned she was most likely to have gone. He was right about that. And it was he who found her lifeless body among the tall weeds in a clearing, brutally beaten to death.

"I *still* can't believe it!" Walter Reiman whispered.

But even at that moment, Sheriff Goad, Coroner Folsom and Sheriff William Roach of the State Police were at the scene of the crime. They heard the story of the search from the neighbors who had remained there.

After a brief, hasty examination the coroner said, "Until I perform an autopsy, all I know you can see for yourself. The girl was beaten to death with a club, or some such weapon. I'd say she has been dead three or four hours."

Sheriff Goad studied the wounds. "A club picked up around here would have left bits of bark imbedded in the wounds. The weapon must have been something smooth. A gun butt, for instance. And—where is the gun the girl was carrying—her own gun?"

The state police officer was thinking of something else. He looked at his watch. "Three or four hours. Since the killer met her here, he must have been on

foot. He may still be in the neighborhood. There's just a chance that we can pick him up before he manages to get away."

He hurried to the nearest telephone, and in a matter of minutes, state patrol cars were surrounding the area, with orders to pick up every man who couldn't give a satisfactory account of where he had been since four that tragic afternoon.

Meantime, Sheriff Goad thought about the missing gun. Had it been the weapon? And why had the killer taken it away with him? Would a sane man carry with him a weapon which could so easily link him to a crime? Obviously not. He promptly sent out a call to determine if there were reports of any recent escapes from insane asylums.

Finally he called together the white-faced men and boys who had searched for pretty sixteen year old June Reiman—and found her. Had any of them seen June during that afternoon?

A neighbor had seen her shortly after four o'clock. He hadn't paid much attention, as she frequently went hunting by herself. She'd been crossing the bridge over McKay Creek, and had stopped to talk with a boy on a bicycle.

A young man in the group spoke up. He was Ronald Elder, whose family were the Reiman's nearest neighbors, living just across the creek from them.

"That was me. I met June on the bridge as I was riding home, stopped to talk with her. She told me she was going rabbit hunting. I told her there were some good fish in the pools along the creek, and that she might get some of them."

(A note to you city people: Up in the northwest, where I myself was raised, it's no more unusual for the 16 year old daughter of the family to go shooting rabbits or catching fish than it is for a 16 year old city girl to run down to the corner for a loaf of bread and a pound of hamburger.)

Everyone else in the group was questioned, but no one had seen June Reiman that afternoon.

Had anyone seen any suspicious-looking strangers in the neighborhood?

One of June's high-school classmates said, "I saw a fellow who looked like a tramp, when I was fishing quite a ways farther up the creek. He looked pretty seedy, and he had a bushy beard. He was stepping right along as if he was in a hurry."

He added a few more details of description, and said that he thought he could identify the man if he saw him again, though he wouldn't swear to it.

The description was phoned to

the State Police, and the patrols began watching for the bearded stranger who had been near the scene of the crime at the time the girl must have been killed.

There was nothing more to be done at the scene of the crime. The tired police officers drove back to the sheriff's office. They had barely arrived there when word came that a suspect who fitted the description of the stranger seen by June's school mate had been caught and was being brought in for questioning.

That sounded encouraging, especially when the information was added that he had seemed reluctant to talk.

It was late—nearly midnight—when the suspect was brought in by two state police officers. He was tall and thin, middle-aged, with a long, heavy beard and flashing black eyes.

"You got no right to bring me here. They say I killed a girl. That's a lie. I never killed anybody."

There was no doubt in Sheriff Goad's mind but that this was the bearded stranger who had been seen near McKay Creek. He sent out a hurry call for the young man who had given him the description.

The suspect went on, "I was working on a sheep ranch in Idaho. Heard I could make good wages working in a munitions factory, over in Hermiston. I was walking there."

"Where were you around five this afternoon?"

"Just walking. Walked all the way. Never hitched a ride or bothered anybody."

Sheriff Roach pointed out to him that he had been seen near the scene of June Reiman's brutal murder.

The bearded stranger was willing to admit it. Sure, he'd walked along the creek a ways. It was a short cut. But he hadn't seen anyone there, or along the road.

By that time the sleepy-eyed young man who had been June's class-mate had been awakened and brought to the sheriff's office. He took one look at the bearded stranger and declared,

"That's the man I saw! There's no doubt about that."

The suspect continued to maintain his innocence, but the sheriff noticed some dark stains on his soiled shirt and badly worn overalls. Bloodstains? Possibly. Goad arranged a change of clothing, and sent the shirt and overalls to a laboratory for tests.

By the next day, a few other suspects had been brought in for questioning. After careful checking on their stories all were released, save for one young man whose only alibi was that he had been drunk.

"I went to a tavern about noon and got to drinking with some guys I didn't know. After a couple of hours I guess I must have

passed out. I woke up this morning in an alley and found out I'd been robbed."

His face was badly scratched and bruised. There were marks of dried blood on his face.

"I don't know what happened to me, or how, or where."

The suspect obviously had a bad hangover, but Sheriff Goad wasn't taking any chances. He arranged for scrapings from under the victim's fingernails to be analyzed in the police laboratory. The results might show that the murdered girl had caused the scratches on the suspect's face.

One thing seemed especially significant. The girl was an expert shot, and she was carrying her rifle. Her body had been found in a clearing where it would have been impossible for anyone to approach her without her knowledge. Why, then, hadn't she used the gun, instead of letting her murderer take it from her and beat her to death with it? Didn't that seem to indicate that the murderer had been someone she knew, and not a stranger?

Wasn't it probable that if she had seen the bearded man, or the other suspect, she would have defended herself with the rifle she knew so well how to use?

The police decided to check again on her friends, as soon as they had finished a daylight search of the scene. They had to find that gun.

Sheriff Goad theorized: "He obviously carried the gun away with him. But he must have known that he had to get rid of it as soon as he could. I'd guess that he would throw it into one of the deep pools beside the creek."

They started slowly up the little stream, carefully watching for footprints or other clues. Suddenly, as they reached a small plank bridge, Goad said, "Wait a minute—I see something!"

He pointed and said excitedly, "There's a gun down in that pool."

He waded out to where it lay and lifted it out of the water. Then for a moment he stood, looking along the edge of the water for possible footprints. There were a few, but they were too wet and muddy to be of value. But he did see something else. Halfway up the bank, there was a knee print.

A laboratory man was hastily sent for, to make a cast of the print. The gun was carefully examined. Yes, it had belonged to June. And it had been used to commit her murder.

But who had used the gun—and who had left the knee print?

The laboratory experts could only say that the print had been left by someone wearing corduroys. Most of the high school boys in and around Pendleton

wore corduroys. So did most of the young men in town. Checking on that knee print was going to be a long and difficult task.

It began to look like a dead end. Especially when the laboratory reported that the stains on the bearded stranger's shirt and overalls were not blood-stains—just plain dirt. And that the scrapings from under the young victim's fingernails proved nothing against the suspect with the still-bad hangover. Besides, neither the bearded stranger nor the young man with the hangover had worn corduroys.

Of course, the knee print might have nothing to do with the case. Some youngster could have left it, scrambling up the muddy bank of McKay Creek.

The long period of questioning began. June had been extremely popular with the boys in high school, but she had never paid much attention to any one of them. One by one the boys who had taken her to parties and on dates were questioned, and one by one they were eliminated.

At the very bottom of the list, the police had the name of Ronald Elder. Not only was his story straight-forward and clear, but he was sufficiently younger than the 16 year old girl to be discarded as a possible admirer. But at last he too was to be questioned.

At the Elder home, the boy's mother explained that he was not at home—he was expected shortly. Had he happened to notice any young man who had mud on the knees of his corduroys after June Reiman was murdered? The mother said that she didn't know. Probably not, because he'd been at home for several days afterward.

She went on to explain that he'd been fishing that day, got his feet wet, and been home for two days with a cold. In the excitement over June's disappearance, he'd neglected to change into dry shoes.

That looked like it, even though it was very little to go on. Ronald had been the last person seen with her. He wore corduroys. He'd gotten his feet wet the day of her murder, and been in bed with a cold for the next two days.

Two state police officers, whom Elder didn't know, were delegated to question him. Their assignment was, simply, to have him show them the scene of the crime.

Ronald Elder was cooperative and willing to talk. He showed where they had talked standing on the bridge, the direction she had taken, the place where her body had been found. Finally, he pointed out the pool where the gun had been found.

One of the officers, Captain Malehorn, remarked on the fact that the murderer had carelessly

left his footprints in the mud. And his knee print on the bank of the creek. Then he casually mentioned the fact that Ronald had gotten his feet wet that day, and had been laid up with a bad cold.

The boy broke down.

"All right. I killed her. I left my bicycle by the bridge, and walked with her. She let me carry her rifle for her. I was going to show her how to shoot some fish. Out in the woods, I asked her if she would be my steady girl. I told her—how much I loved her."

He hesitated a moment. "She laughed at me and walked off. Suddenly I got mad. I didn't know what I was doing. I took the gun and shot her. I couldn't stand it. I'd loved her ever since we were kids, even though she was older than me. I just saw red. When she fell, I knew what I'd done, but it was too late. I pounded her with the gun to make sure she was dead, then I threw the gun in the creek."

The officers were incredulous. According to all the reports, the murdered girl had been clubbed to death, not shot. But the boy stubbornly stuck to his story.

A second examination of the body proved his story to be true.

A few weeks later Ronald Elder was sentenced to life imprisonment in the State Penitentiary.

He was less than sixteen when he killed, for love. And if he hadn't gotten his feet wet, and caught a cold—he might have gotten away with it!

THE VANISHING MUSTACHES

Mexican policemen went to court this Fall to protect their right to wear mustaches.

There has long been a saying in Mexico that "a man without a mustache is like a meal without salt."

General Francisco Martinez Peralta, head of Mexico City's traffic police, disagreeing, this fall, issued an order requiring all men in his department to shave off their mustaches or beards.

It so happens that not too many policemen actually do wear mustaches—an obvious concession to the trend of the day—but ten indignant officers, concerned at this administrative violation of their human and civil rights, went to court in defence of their right to wear mustaches if they so chose. Their lawyer, Rafael Arenas Montero, filed for an injunction to hold up the order and Federal Judge Arturo Serrano Robles granted the injunction.

We are awaiting word on what happened next.

sam rall's private ghost

by Bruno Fischer

CIVILIZED GHOSTS don't wear sheets or form ectoplasm at séances. They're more frightening than that. They inhabit the mind. And nowadays medicine men are called psychiatrists and their mumbo-jumbo has attained the dignity of a complete scientific jargon. Everything can be explained.

Except, I sometimes think, the ghost Sam Rall met that Tuesday night in a bar off Broadway.

At about four in the morning Sam let himself into the apartment. That wasn't particularly late for a theatrical agent who did a lot of his work in night clubs, but it was unusual for him to wake me by slamming the door and then wandering about muttering to himself. Sam Rall was a considerate guy, even when drunk.

For three years now we had shared an apartment on Central Park West. We were both thirty-two, both unmarried; we had both been shot at by Nazis in France and Belgium and Germany. We wore each other's shirts and ties. When I was sick, he nursed me. When he was

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overloaded with liquor, I put him to bed.

Now I got out of my bed to put him into his.

But he wasn't drunk. Not for him, anyway. He could walk without a tremor. And that was what he was doing when I came out of my room, walking back and forth and running both hands through his unruly hair and muttering to himself.

"Don't tell me you just lost your ten percent of an actor," I said.

Sam Rall stopped dead, turned slowly, and stared at me out of pale eyes. He was a stretch of a man who seemed to sway when he stood and fold in two when he sat. Not handsome by a long shot, but with a weakly amiable face the ladies liked. At the moment his face looked like off-colored putty in which the features had blurred.

"It's nothing," he said quickly. "Nothing at all."

In other words, there was plenty. Probably another girl. The last one had been a married woman. When that had blown up two months ago, he had gone on a bender that had made history among his friends, and ended up with the D.T.'s in the Bellevue alcoholic ward.

"Who's the girl this time?" I said.

Sam laughed. It was a laugh that gave you goose-pimples.

"Julia Alison," he said.

I sighed. "So she came back?"

"Yes," he said. "Back from the grave."

And he went into his room and closed the door.

I returned to my bed. But not to sleep. I couldn't sleep while Sam Rall kept moving about in his room and then in the living room and never for a moment ceasing to mumble to himself.

It was plain that he hadn't yet exorcised the ghost in his mind.

In a way I had started it. I had introduced him to Julia Alison.

Julia and I had been kids together in our home town of Hessian Valley. Some ten months ago I'd run across her on Madison Avenue—that was close to nine years since I'd last seen her. She was a mature woman of around twenty-nine now, as slender, as blonde, and maybe even prettier.

She told me she was married to a salesman named George Alison and living in their own house in Brooklyn. I told her I was a rewrite man on the New York *Courier-Express* and still fancy free. I ended up by inviting her and her husband to a party I was throwing that Saturday night in my apartment.

She and her husband came, and that was a mistake. The minute Sam Rall saw her he fell for her, and to a considerable

extent she felt the same way about him.

There were two reasons why her husband made it easy for her to be unfaithful to him. First because George Alison was a short, plump, simpering guy who never stopped talking and never said anything that wasn't inane. Second, because he was a traveling salesman in hardware and was away from home for long periods at a time. So when hubby was away, Sam and Julia would play.

I didn't like it, but it was their business so I kept my mouth shut. Besides, Sam's intentions were as honorable as they could be under the circumstances. He wanted her to divorce George Alison and marry him. One night he told me rapturously that he believed he had persuaded her.

Two days later George Alison burst into our apartment with a sheet of white paper in his hand.

It was a Sunday afternoon and Sam and I were lounging in our pajamas and listening to the Giant-Dodgers game on the radio. George Alison stared at Sam as if he couldn't believe that he was real.

"You're here," Alison said incredulously.

Sam was on his feet and there was no blood in his face. "Has anything happened to Julia?"

Alison extended the sheet of paper to Sam. I stepped to Sam's side and read what was on it. There were two typewritten sentences. They said:

I am sorry, George, but I can't go on like this. I am going away with the man I love.

Julia had signed her name in pencil.

"I came home from a trip this afternoon," Alison said brokenly, "and I found Julia gone and this note on the table. She took most of her clothes. I thought you—you——"

"No," Sam said quietly. He returned the note to Alison and then ran his hands over his face. "Who's the man?"

"I have no idea. I was sure it was you."

I felt sorry for both of them. They had both lost her.

Over the radio came the news that Johnny Mize had slammed a homer with two on and tied the score, but I no longer cared. I shut off the radio. When I turned, I saw that George Alison had departed without another word and that Sam was going into his room.

A few minutes later Sam left the apartment and got drunk. He stayed drunk for two weeks and ended up in the alcoholic ward. When he came out, he told me that he was sure that George Alison had murdered his wife.

"There was no other man," he said. "After Alison murdered her, he wrote that note to himself and signed her name."

"What gives you that idea?"

"Julia wouldn't have gone off with anybody but me," he said. "She loved me."

Maybe. Just barely maybe. I did a bit of investigating. I went to the Alison house in Brooklyn and learned from the neighbors that Alison had closed up the house after his wife had run out on him and had moved to a hotel in Manhattan. And from a gossipy matron next door, who apparently spent most of her time peeping out at her neighbors, I learned that Julia had had more than one male visitor while her husband was away on his trips.

One was tall and blond—that would be Sam Rall. The other was husky and dark-haired—that would be the lad with whom she had gone off.

I couldn't see anything that would interest the police.

When I told Sam, he shook his head. "He murdered her," he insisted, wetting his lips as if he could use a drink.

And now tonight, weeks later, Sam was prowling the apartment and mumbling crazily to himself. And he had told me that she had come to him from the grave. If something wasn't done about him, he would be a case for a psychiatrist. So I got out of bed.

Sam was lighting a cigarette. Or trying to. His hands shook so that he couldn't make contact with the match.

"Where did you meet Julia?" I said.

"In Spangler's bar."

"Do the dead frequent bars?" I said.

Sam looked at me with his mouth crooked. "Julia knew she'd find me there."

He told me about it then. At ten o'clock last night he had been standing at the bar when a soft voice he knew so well said, "Hello, darling." And there she had been beside him.

His first reaction to her had been a coldness he felt in his bones. His second reaction had been that he was drunk and seeing things, but he'd had to discard that idea because the highball in his hand was only the second that evening. Then he had become rational. He'd never had proof that she was dead—only a hunch, a suspicion—and here she was very much alive. That, of course, was wonderful.

He couldn't quite see her face because of her black veil. But it was Julia Alison, all right. Her voice, her stunning figure, and an outfit he remembered. She wore an emerald green tweed suit and a beaver hat, also emerald green, shaped something like a derby. That color was perfect with her blonde hair, though little of it was visible because of the black veil caught up under her chin and tied in back of her hat.

Not that her face was completely hidden. Through the mesh her lovely face looked as if seen in vague moonlight. Her sensuous red lips, partly opened as if in surprise, were definite enough. He wondered why she wore a veil. She had never done so before, with this outfit or any other.

"So you're back, Julia," he had said.

"I've never been away," she had said.

He had frowned. "Look. You ran off with some guy. You left your husband a note."

"I've never been away," she repeated. "Not really. I've been looking for you, darling. For a long time."

It was screwy. It hadn't made sense. Sam had turned from the bar and looked around. At a couple of tables there had been people he knew. Bart Hilton, the director, had risen from one of those tables and come over to ask if one of Sam's clients, an actress, was at liberty for a part.

"Bart," Sam had said, "I'd like you to meet Julia Alison."

Julia had inclined her head, and through her veil Sam had seen her red lips smile. Bart Hilton had looked directly at her without acknowledging the introduction.

"Who?" Bart Hilton said.

"Julia Alison."

"Where is she?" Bart Hilton said.

"Right here," Sam said. "This young lady."

Again Julia nodded and smiled, but Bart Hilton hadn't looked at her. He had stared at Sam with a queer expression, scratched his nose. Then he had said in a kind of scared tone, "Excuse me, Sam," and returned to his table.

Sam had wondered what was the matter with Bart Hilton. He had been absolutely impolite to Julia.

"Bart's a director," he had explained to her with a weak laugh, "and all directors are wacky."

Julia put a hand on his arm. "Let's go, darling."

"How about a drink?" he suggested.

"Let's go," she said.

They left Spangler's. When they were standing outside on Forty-fourth Street, he said, "Where are you staying?"

"In my house in Brooklyn, of course," she said.

"Back with your husband?"

"No," she said. "He closed up the house for himself, but not for me."

That was an odd way of putting it, he thought. What she no doubt meant was that he had turned over the house to her and had consented to a separation. Maybe now she would marry him. He had hailed a cab and given the Brooklyn address.

When they were settled in the cab, Sam had taken her hand. She had been wearing gloves,

but through the gloves he had felt a penetrating coldness. He hadn't given that much thought because it was, after all, a chilly October evening.

"Now stop talking in riddles," he said. "Where have you been?"

The cab was waiting for a traffic light to change. The driver turned and spoke through the window between them. "What did you say, mister?" he asked.

"I'm talking to the lady," Sam said.

"What lady?"

"The one with me, of course," Sam had told him irritably.

The cab driver's eyes got big. The light changed and he sent his hack downtown toward Manhattan Bridge. Every couple of minutes he'd glance back nervously, especially when Sam spoke to Julia.

Sam Rall had decided that everybody was acting a trifle crazy. And that included Julia. She kept pretending that she hadn't gone away with another man, that, in fact, she hadn't left Brooklyn at all. Probably she didn't want to discuss it within hearing of the cab driver. So after a while Sam let it go at that and just sat beside her. He was no longer holding her hand. It was too cold, freezing his own hand.

The cab pulled up in front of her house in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. It was a two-storey frame house with maybe twenty feet of space between it and either of its neighbors, which in Brooklyn practically made it an estate. As Sam got out of the cab and started to give Julia a hand, the cab driver stared at him with mouth open. Then he snatched the money from Sam's hand and tore away from there as if devils were on his tail.

Julia led Sam up the driveway and around to the back door. He waited for her to get her key out, but the door was unlocked. He followed her into the kitchen.

She hadn't put on the light. He groped after her and then struck a match. He saw a light-switch and snapped it. Nothing happened. That switch must be broken, he thought, and suddenly he didn't see her. He didn't hear her, either. She must have gone on into the hall. He struck another match and followed. His shoes on the bare floor echoed hollowly through the house, but somehow her footsteps were inaudible.

He lit a third match when he turned into the living room, and he saw her standing near the couch, waiting for him. There was a light-switch near the door, but that didn't work either. George Alison had had the electricity turned off when he had closed the house, and no doubt Julia hadn't yet had it turned on.

"You must have come back

only today if there's no light," he said.

"I never was away," she said.

The house had a musty, closed-in smell. The tiny flare of the match showed a considerable layer of dust on the table. He had found himself annoyed by her insistence that she hadn't been away. But there seemed to be no use arguing with her.

All the shades in the room were drawn. He crossed over to a window and pulled up a shade. Light flowed in from a street lamp directly in front of the house. He pulled up a second shade, and now he could see her clearly enough.

"It's been so lonely, darling," she said. Her gloved hands were at the back of her head, untying the veil. "You haven't kissed me yet."

That was what he wanted to do above anything else. He went eagerly to her. Her veil was loose now, extending down past her chin. He started to lift the veil.

Her hands, so very cold through the gloves, closed over his wrists.

"Darling," she said, "how much do you love me?"

"I can't begin to tell you," he had said.

"Then whatever happens you won't stop loving me? It's been so terribly lonely. Promise me that you'll come here again tomorrow night."

"Try to keep me away," he had said lightly, and had lifted her veil and leaned toward her.

He had screamed. He had staggered away from her.

He did not remember getting out of that house. He had a vague idea that for hours he had roamed the streets, ridden the subway. Now here he was in our apartment, with daylight coming in through the windows, and in a broken, incredulous voice he was telling me all this.

"It was a dead face, Les," Sam Rall said to me. He sat with his head in his hands. "Not just an empty, lifeless face—that would have been bad enough. All I'd really seen through the veil were the painted lips and a vague indication of features. When I lifted the veil there wasn't really a face. She had been dead too long."

His voice rose shrilly on those last words. His long body unwound. He stood quivering like a birch tree in a wind.

"Take it easy, Sam," I said gently. "A man can want a woman so much that she becomes intensely real in a dream."

"The last time I saw her she was so lovely. Would I dream her up with a face like that?"

"Sure," I said, "because you have a notion she's dead. Dreams have their own consistency."

"I wasn't dreaming. I was moving around. I didn't dream that I met her in Spangler's, that I went with her to her house, that

I—" He broke off, shuddering. "Les, do you think it's the D.T.'s again?"

I didn't answer that. I said, "What you need is some sleep. You'll be all right when you wake up."

He just stood there rubbing his hands over his face as if wiping away invisible cobwebs. I put an arm about his shoulders and led him into his room. He undressed silently, and I kept my mouth shut, too. There wasn't any point in starting him off again. When I looked in on him ten minutes later, he was asleep.

By then it was broad daylight and I was due at work in an hour. I showered, shaved, dressed. Sam tossed and moaned in his sleep, but he didn't wake.

At eleven o'clock, after I'd typed out the story of a Westside tenement fire phoned in by a legman, I lit a cigarette and thought some more about the wacky story Sam Rall had told me. It had occurred to me that maybe he had really been in Spangler's with Julia Alison—alive, of course.

Say she'd got tired of the guy she'd gone off with and was eager to take up with Sam again. She'd made the round of the ginmills where she knew he hung out, and had found him in Spangler's. As for the business of a dead face—well, something had happened to make him see ghosts again. You can never tell about alcoholics. They're inclined to see anything.

There was an easy way to check on the first part of the story. I phoned Bart Hilton at his home.

He answered gruffly, sleepily. For a director, eleven in the morning was bedtime. I told him who I was and then asked him if he'd seen Sam Rall last night in Spangler's.

"I'll say I did," Hilton said. "You better do something about Sam. He's in a bad way again."

My fingers tightened on the phone. "What happened?"

"You ever hear about the little man who wasn't there?" Hilton said. "Well, last night Sam introduced me to a lady who wasn't there."

"Did he say her name was Julia Alison?"

"Something like that," Hilton said. "He kept insisting she was right there at the bar. There wasn't anybody—not near him, anyway. Sam's a nice guy, but it's plain he needs a drink cure or something."

"I'm afraid so," I said, and hung up.

During lunch I ran up to the apartment to see how Sam was. He had dressed and left. That was a good sign. After all, he had his work to attend to. I phoned his office to make sure, and learned that he hadn't come in. After I returned to the *Courier-Express* city room and

did some more work, I phoned Sam's office again. He still hadn't come in.

That was when I started to worry, but there wasn't anything I could do about it till I knocked off. Then I made the rounds.

I started in at Spangler's. Yes he'd been there four or five hours ago, sopping it up. I went from there to Lou's, to the Castle, to Marty's, to all the other high class ginmills he hung around. In some he'd been that day, in some he hadn't. At about eight-thirty I found him.

Sam was slouched at a corner table in a Columbus Avenue bar not far from the apartment. I had to shake him to rouse him. One look at the slack mouth and bleary eyes showed me that he was deep in one of his major bats.

"I'm taking you home," I said.

Loosely he shook his head. "Can't go, Les, old boy. Gotta date."

"Come on, get on your feet."

"Gotta date with Julia. Promised her last night."

I humored him. "You look too sloppy to meet a lady. At least come home and shave and dress."

He frowned heavily, thinking it over, then nodded gravely. "You're right, Les. Gotta make myself sweet and clean for Julia."

I got him home. I undressed him like a baby and stuffed him under a shower and put him to bed. He submitted meekly until I pulled the blanket under his chin, then he reared up.

"Hey, can't go to sleep," he protested. "Promised Julia I'd see her tonight."

I didn't remind him that according to his own story he had fled shrieking from her last night. Maybe he had forgotten, or maybe in his present condition it didn't matter.

"How do you think she'll feel," I said patiently, "when you come staggering in cockeyed drunk?"

He subsided, sank back on his pillow and closed his eyes. "But she's expecting me. I can't stand her up."

"I'll tell her you got sick."

"Will you, Les?" he said. "You're a pal."

Almost at once he was off in a heavy, sodden sleep. I left the apartment. I took a cab to the Alison house in Brooklyn.

All the way there I felt pretty silly. I'd promised him, but there was no point in carrying out that kind of promise. It wasn't that, though. I had to see for myself. Julia Alison might have returned home. If she had, I wanted to know it and bring her back to the apartment and have Sam look at her and see that she was like any other living woman.

The house was dark. The front door was locked. That didn't surprise me. George Alison had locked it two months ago and that was all there was to it.

I returned to the sidewalk and took a few steps away from the house and stopped. Sam had told me that he and Julia had entered through the back door. So what? He would have imagined that along with the rest.

All the same, I went down the driveway. And the back door was unlocked. I entered.

By the light of matches I made my way across the kitchen and up the hall. A musty, cloying smell was thick in my nostrils and filled my mouth. I remembered that he had mentioned it. I turned into the living room.

She was there. She was lying on the floor.

The match burned my fingers. I clamped my teeth into my lower lip and struck another match. It took me a long time because of the way my hands were shaking. At last I got it lit. I went forward.

Julia Alison wore the clothes Sam had described—the emerald green tweed suit. The emerald green hat shaped like a derby and with a black veil fastened to the brim was not on her head. It lay on the floor near a gloved hand.

He had said that he had seen her painted lips through her veil. But she had no lips. She had no face, or what looked like a face. She had been dead a long time.

No, she'd never been away from that house.

The match went out. I didn't light another. I stumbled out of there in darkness. When I was in the street, I ran for a cop. . . .

It was midmorning when I returned to the apartment. The shower was running in the bathroom. I sank into the armchair, too exhausted to move another muscle.

After a while Sam Rall opened the bathroom door and stood on the threshold toweling his lean, sickish-white body. He looked a lot better than when I had put him to bed last night; he couldn't have looked worse. But his pale eyes remained haunted.

"What are you doing home at this hour, Les?" he asked. "Aren't you supposed to be on the job?"

He didn't know that I hadn't been at home at all last night.

"Julia Alison is dead," I said.

The information didn't surprise him. "I told you that all along. I told you how the night before last I saw her dead face."

"Last night after I put you to bed I went to her house," I said. "I found her on the living room floor, wearing the same clothes in which you had seen her. She'd been strangled. The medical examiner wasn't sure how long—weeks or months. He said it could have been two months ago when she disappeared."

The towel fell from Sam's hands. He shambled across to

the couch and dropped limply down on it.

"I'd known Julia well," I went on. "But she'd been dead too long. The only way she could be positively identified was by her teeth. Her dentist lived only a few doors away. He said it was Julia beyond doubt."

"Of course." Sam lifted his head from his hands. "What about George Alison?"

"The police are after him. He lives in a midtown hotel. He's away on a selling trip, but his firm expects him back this morning. The way the police figure it, he found out that she was being unfaithful to him. She was dressed for the street—that green suit, gloves, hat. Maybe he caught her just after she had written that note telling him she was going away with another man."

"She wasn't going away with me," Sam muttered. "I wanted her to do it decently, divorce Alison and marry me."

"She was seeing somebody else as well as you," I said. "A husky, dark-haired man. He must be the one."

Sam moaned a little. He looked downright pathetic, slumping there naked on the couch.

"Alison left her there and shut up the house," he said thinly. "I suppose after he choked her to death he didn't have the nerve to hide her body, or even go there again. That's why on Tuesday night she told me she had never been away. She'd been there all the time."

The ghost was still in his mind. Maybe it would always be.

"Sam," I said, "were you in that house last night?"

He frowned at me in annoyance. "I told you how she picked me up in Spangler's and brought me there. I made the mistake of lifting her veil. It would have been all right if I hadn't lifted her veil."

"Listen," I said. "This is what happened. You went to her house. You were drawn there by a ghost, all right, but it was a private ghost, existing only for you. It was conjured up by your love for her, your hunger for her. You found her on the floor the way I did, and the shock mixed you up. Your subconscious mind created a whole series of events leading up to finding her dead."

Sam looked at me dully, as if there was no use arguing with somebody so obstinate.

I sank lower in my chair, thinking of how yesterday over the phone Bart Hilton had told me that in Spangler's Sam had introduced him to a woman who wasn't there. Was I beginning to believe in that particular ghost myself?

Sam was on his feet, shuffling toward his room.

"Sam," I said, "I told the police that I went to the Alison house last night because of an anony-

mous tip that came to me at the *Courier-Express*. I didn't mention your story. They'd think it was a gag, They'd get tough with you because you hadn't reported finding a dead body. They'd pile on you with all they have."

"That's all right," he said, looking at me over a narrow bare shoulder. "I'll go tell them."

"Don't," I urged. "You don't know the way those babies work on a guy. Your nerves are bad enough already. By the time the cops get through with you, you'll have the screaming meemies. And it's not important. They have all they need to send George Alison to the chair."

Slowly he nodded. "You're the best pal a man ever had, Les. The way you've nursed me, taken care of me, put up with my drinking." He went into his room.

I'd had a hard day and a hard night. I climbed into bed.

A couple of hours later the phone woke me. Paul Wax, the day city editor, sneered at me over the wire:

"I thought you were a working newspaperman. Here you got a swell exclusive about how a *Courier-Express* reporter found the body of a woman murdered a couple of months ago, and then you wash your hands of it while things are breaking fast."

"I'm a rewrite man, not a legman," I retorted. "That extra stint entitles me to sleep. Read the Guild contract."

"Have a heart, Les. The Alison case is your baby. Scoot over to Brooklyn for a follow-up."

"Okay," I growled, yawning expansively. Then I remembered something he'd said. "What things are breaking fast?"

But he had already hung up.

I didn't bother to call back. I'd get the straight dope when I reached Brooklyn.

Sam wasn't in the apartment. I hoped the fool wouldn't go to the cops. I dressed and boarded a cab.

I got special consideration for a newspaperman. Lieutenant Woodfinch of the Homicide Squad plucked me out of the half-dozen reporters hanging around the precinct station and led me up to his office. I settled myself in a chair at the side of his desk and hoped that this favored treatment was only because I'd discovered the body for him.

"George Alison was picked up a couple of hours ago as he entered his hotel," he told me. "I just got through having an interesting talk with him."

"Did he confess?" I asked.

Lieutenant Woodfinch unrolled an oilskin pouch the size of an apron and leisurely loaded a curved pipe. He seemed to have forgotten that I was there. I felt more than a little uneasy.

"Alison denies that he mur-

dered his wife," he said after he had a light to his satisfaction. "He claims that he thought all along she'd run off with another man. He showed me a farewell note he says she left him."

"He kept it all this time?"

"It's typewritten, except for her signature. Probably forged. The experts are working on it. Alison says he showed that note to two men right after she left him. One, he says, is named Sam Rall—suspected him of messing around with his wife. The other, he says, is Les Glass, a childhood friend of his wife. Your name is Les Glass."

He sat back and drew placidly on his pipe.

I crossed my legs. "I'm afraid I wasn't so smart last night. I didn't see where that mattered. I wanted to keep Sam and myself out of it."

"That's obvious." Only the corners of his mouth smiled. It wasn't a smile to make a man feel comfortable.

"There's more that's obvious," I said testily. "Alison typed that note and forged his wife's name to it, and showed it to Sam Rall and me and probably everyone else who knew Julia, so that nobody would start wondering what had become of her. It stands to reason. If he hadn't killed her, he certainly would have seen her lying dead in the living room between the time he found the note and closed up the house. The fact that he didn't report her murder to the police is conclusive evidence against him."

"Is it?" Lieutenant Woodfinch struck a match for his pipe. "It would be if her body had been in the living room."

I gawked at him. "Wait a minute," I said slowly. "Are you saying that she was murdered somewhere else and then brought there?"

"Probably she was murdered right there," he said. "But she wasn't left there. We knew that almost at once last night. After all, a body dead that long—well, the neighbors would have noticed a smell. The laboratory boys got to work. They found bits of lint on her clothes and some coal dust. That told us where to look. There are a couple of tons of coal left in the cellar bin. Under the coal there was fresh cement."

He paused. I met his eyes squarely, keeping my face stiff.

"She'd been wrapped in a sheet and then buried in a hole dug under the bin," Woodfinch said.

"No more than two days ago her body was dug up again and brought up to the living room. Then the hole was cemented once more and the coal shoveled back over it."

I felt my lips start to quiver.

Woodfinch leaned toward me,

his eyes snapping. "Anything to say?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I have something to say . . ."

That evening I located Sam Rall in Spangler's bar. He sat at a table behind the phone booth. That put him out of sight of most of the patrons. He wasn't as far gone as last night, but a couple more of those double bourbons would put him there.

Groggily he raised his head when I sat down opposite him. His slack mouth twisted into a caricature of a sneer.

"Les, my pal, my nursemaid," he said thickly. "Come to take me home to bed. Well, I'm not going."

I shook my head compassionately. "I can't say I blame you. I'd want to dope myself with liquor if I learned that that had happened to a woman I loved."

"Knew it all along," he said. "Told you from the beginning."

I called the waiter over and ordered a sidecar. Sam poured what was left of his drink down his throat and ordered another double bourbon.

"Did they get that rat Alison yet?" he asked me.

"He's in jail."

"When's he gonna burn? I wanna see it."

"There has to be a trial first," I said. "Sam, did Julia really come here for you Tuesday night?"

"I told you and I told you. She's dead, but she still loves me. And heaven help me, I still love her. I—" His head dropped into his folded arms. He remained like that until the drinks arrived.

I had another sidecar after that one and he had still another bourbon. Then I said:

"Time to go home, Sam."

He didn't protest. When he stood, his legs wobbled. I held his arm. I poured him into a cab and got in with him. He sat huddled in a corner of the seat and breathed through his mouth.

Sam didn't speak until we were stepping out of the elevator on our floor.

"Les, I'm drinking too much," he said then.

"Uh-huh."

"I gotta cut it out or I'll be back in Bellevue. Make a clean break. Not even a cocktail before meals. Les, you gotta help me. You're the pal who always helps me."

"Sure," I said, sticking the key into the lock.

I let him enter first. He took a step into the living room and stopped.

"Julia," Sam said thickly. "So you came here."

I went to his side. "What did you say, Sam?"

"I was talking to Julia. Don't you see her standing there by the window?"

"No," I said.

He pressed his knuckles into

his eyes. Then he took his hands away and a kind of glow spread over his face. He nodded.

"I know, Julia. I'm the only one can see you because I love you so much. No, I'm not afraid. Not as long as you wear the veil."

I started to reach into my pocket for a cigarette. My hand didn't come out. I stood very still. I had ceased to exist for Sam.

"I know I promised to come last night, Julia," he was saying, "but I got sick. I sent Les to tell you. He—"

Again he was listening. He frowned; an angry light came into his pale, fuzzy eyes. "You were right in coming here when the police drove you out of your house in Brooklyn. Well, Les has as much right to this apartment as I have, but—" He turned his head to me. "Les, Julia would like to be alone with me for a while. You don't mind, do you?"

"I don't mind," I said.

I started to leave. When I was in the foyer I heard Sam say: "Only don't lift your veil, Julia. I love you, but I can't stand that."

I opened the hall door and went out.

In the apartment, Sam Rall moved toward where she stood so slender in her emerald green suit and wearing that beaver hat shaped like a derby and the black veil gathered up under her chin. All that he could see through the veil were her red lips smiling enticingly.

When he had almost reached her, he checked himself. He put his hands up to his face.

"Julia, this can't go on," he whimpered. "You're dead and I'm drunk. Les is right. You're a ghost—a ghost that exists only for me."

"You made me a ghost, Sam," she said quietly.

His long body swayed. "Julia, I love you so."

"Then why did you murder me?" she said.

He stepped backward. A chair stopped him and he sank into it. He trembled.

"You said you forgave me, Julia," he muttered. "Something came over me when you told me that I mustn't see you any more. I grabbed you by the throat. And then you were dead and I—I—"

She was no longer listening to him or looking at him. Her eyes were fixed on the door of my bedroom.

Sam Rall lifted his head and saw two men come out of my room. He didn't know until a minute later that one was Detective-Lieutenant Woodfinch from Brooklyn and the other a Manhattan detective.

The girl said, "You heard him confess," and lifted her veil.

She wasn't Julia Alison. She had a similar figure and her hair was more or less the same color; that was why the police had got

her for this job. Her emerald green suit and hat had been copied on a rush order from those Julia had worn when she had been murdered.

Sam Rall stumbled to his feet and looked around wildly. And he saw me coming back into the apartment from the hall where I had been waiting.

He was no longer so drunk. Only bitter.

"So you did this to me, Les?" he said. "My pal!"

I turned my face away. . . .

Later, when Sam Rall was taken away, Lieutenant Woodfinch gave me a hearty grin.

"Well, your scheme worked," he said.

I hated him for his cheerfulness, though there was no reason why he shouldn't be pleased. He wasn't Sam's closest friend.

"In his state of mind it was pretty sure to work," I said.

"Not to mention the whisky he consumed." Woodfinch leisurely loaded his pipe. "I suppose he's right when he claims he didn't intend to kill her. Simply lost his head when she gave him the brush-off. But he retained enough self-control to bury her under the coal bin and forge her name to a note to her husband. When that was done, he went to pieces and started drinking."

"And started to see a ghost," I mumbled.

Woodfinch didn't take stock in any kind of ghost.

He smiled tolerantly.

"Guess from the first his idea was to frame the husband. He hated George Alison. That's why he kept telling you he thought Alison had murdered his wife. You're a newspaperman; you'd be interested in an exclusive story. He hoped you'd have the house taken apart and the body would be found under the cellar and Alison would burn for it. When that didn't pan out, he let it ride for a few weeks, then he dug up the body and put it in the living room and told you that screwy story about meeting her ghost so you'd go there and find the body."

I stood looking out of the window, saying nothing.

"Only it backfired," he went on. "As soon as I told you the body had been buried and then dug up, you knew that cleared Alison. If he were the killer, he'd want to keep the body hidden. That put the finger on Sam Rall. Most murderers are stupid, but he takes the prize for not letting well enough alone."

I turned to him.

"Sam wasn't stupid. It was only that fact and fancy started to get mixed up in his mind."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen," I said. "When Sam came into this room a while ago and saw a woman he believed to be Julia Alison standing here, he

wasn't startled or even surprised. You heard him speak to her. He acted as if this wasn't the first time they had talked to each other after she was dead."

Woodfinch scowled at me. "Who's loopy now?"

"It had to be that way," I said. "He loved her, but he killed her. He never stopped loving her. She haunted him. That's why he drank so much. And he was drawn back to that house in Brooklyn. He didn't remember digging her up and unwrapping her from the sheet and bringing her up to the living room. Then he saw her face, or what was left of it, and that was too much for him. He ran out of that house. His sense of time got all jumbled up. His sick brain leaped about in time. He really believed that he had gone to the house because she had come to him at Spangler's and taken him there. A psychiatrist can explain it. Wilder delusions than Sam had are common enough. They have a word for it—paranoia."

Woodfinch pulled on his pipe. "So you're trying to set him up for an insanity plea?"

"I don't care one way or the other," I said listlessly.

Lieutenant Woodfinch left then and I was alone in the empty apartment. I stood at the window and thought of how Sam Rall had looked at me when he learned what I had done to him. I thought of the contempt with which he had said: "My pal!"

I had never told him that Julia and I had been childhood sweethearts in Hessian Valley. He hadn't suspected that I had never got over being in love with her.

I had taken care of Sam Rall like a baby when he was drunk. I had put up with a lot from him and hadn't complained. But he shouldn't have killed her.

NEXT MONTH

THE LAST EXPLOIT OF HARRY THE ACTOR
by **ERNEST BRAMAH**

IF THE DEAD COULD TALK
by **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

A VILLAGE BORGIA
by **AUGUST DERLETH**

HOUSE OF THE WOLF
by **BARRY PEROWNE**

and the final exciting instalment of

Vendetta for the Saint

THE NEW SAINT NOVEL by **LESLIE CHARTERIS**

hell's outpost

by Kate Wilhelm

THE JET STOPPED without a jar and Wes snapped his eyes open instantly. He hadn't been asleep, merely waiting, coiled, only a brief telephone conversation to go by, but one that had him enplaned from New York to Denver in less than an hour after lifting the receiver. He remembered every nuance of that call.

"I know you're on leave, Wes, but this is an emergency. It's the chance we've been looking for. I'll not fill you on details since I don't have them myself yet, but briefly, we have reason to believe an espionage agent has been bugging the DEW line equipment and we might have the chance now to nab him. We want to know who it is, Wes. And we don't want him to know we know."

Of six men three remained; two were dead, one missing. That much Wes knew. We waved to the pilot who eyed him with curiosity and then he jumped down to the ground where Major Piquot was standing.

"Wes! Glad to see you. Damn shame about the leave . . ."

"It'd better be good, Julius, that's all I have to say," Wes muttered and drew his coat in

Kate Wilhelm, who returns with this story of a death—under suspicious circumstances—at an isolated post on the DEW line, will be remembered as the author of the interesting first novel, NO BITTER THAN DEATH (Simon & Schuster, 1963). Cleveland born, she has lived most of her life in the East. Her interests include astronomy, fishing and hypnotism.

tighter. A third man came running toward them and Wes nodded in satisfaction. Sergeant O'Brady, the third member of this rather special investigatory team.

"Colonel Aronson," he said saluting, "sorry about the leave, sir."

Wes returned the salute as well as the grin of sympathy at the abrupt termination of a leave that hadn't actually started as yet. "Ok, boys," he said, bracing against the wind, "let's have it. I take it that's our next plane?"

"That's right," Julius agreed looking at the trim jet waiting for them. "Next stop Nome."

The second plane was high over the mountains before Julius filled in the many gaps the brief orders had omitted. "It's a nasty one, Wes. Could be one of our boys has been selling out—or maybe not. Nothing's sure at this point. Yesterday replacements were due to relieve the personnel at Hell's Outpost, that's one of the stop gap temporary bases plugging holes in the DEW line. Anyway, three men flew in; the bush pilot who is under contract, and a couple of sergeants, Willett and Daboski. A third sergeant was supposed to go—it's a three man base—but at the last minute he came down with flu or something. The men at the base were to leave that same afternoon, but with the third replacement missing, one of them, Frank Merrick, was ordered to remain and await another replacement. They always leave one experienced man with any who are new to the climate and conditions. During the afternoon hours a storm came up that prevented the plane from leaving as scheduled and all the men—six of them—were forced to remain over night. At 11 P.M. Sgt. Coriolanus—Corlie on the tape—was taking coffee to Merrick in the radar cage and he saw a light; he described it as resembling a flare."

"How was the weather by then?" Wes asked, his eyes alert although his body was slouched and relaxed in the seat.

"Snowing very hard, wind blowing what amounted to a ground blizzard. But Corlie said the snow lifted a second or so and he saw the light."

"It can do that," Wes agreed, thinking for the moment of his boyhood in the Colorado mountains. "Go on."

"Corlie went on to the cage, but Merrick hadn't seen anything—or got a blip, so he returned to the housing unit. I should back track a bit here," Julius said leaving his finger in the notebook and frowning at Wes. "During the evening Willett, one of the new men, voiced suspicions of the bush pilot and he took the hint and retired to the general bunkroom and went to bed right after supper."

"What suspicions?" Wes asked.

"That's all I have on it," Julius said regretfully. "But that explains things a little later on. Anyway, Corlie went back and told what he saw and said that he was going to have a look around. Willett said he'd go also, but Corlie didn't wait for him to get dressed and went out alone. Before Willett left the housing building, he locked the pilot in the bunkroom. He stated that it would be a good idea to keep the only unauthorized person there under lock and key until they knew what was going on. The others agreed. Willett kept the key. Then he left. Corlie returned about half an hour later, alone. He reported that he had found a spot of ice where snow had melted and froze again. It was decided that Daboski would relieve Merrick in the radar cage and Merrick and Ostler would search for the missing man. While they were gone Daboski and Corlie talked over the telephone, until Ostler returned, in fact. Merrick didn't come back."

"Ten little Indians," Wes murmured. Meditatively he added, "There's an awful lot of testimony that is secondhand. What's the angle?"

Julius grinned and yawned. "I've been up since 2 A.M. letting the experts feed me bits and pieces as they unscrambled the code," he said. "When Corlie went in the first time with the story about the flare, he turned on the tape recorder, and later, he played it over the scramble route too. Unless both he and Ostler are lying, so far most of it checks with the recorder."

"No one but Corlie has mentioned the ice patch," Wes said.

"That's one of the things," Julius admitted. At Wes' nod he went on with it, again consulting with his notebook. "Now Ostler and Corlie are in the general room, Duke in the bunkroom, and Daboski in the radar cage. Two men have gone out and haven't returned. Corlie and Ostler tried the door to the bunkroom and it was still locked. They went out to check his window and they found Merrick's body. He had been stabbed through the chest. They called Daboski and he promised to call back every fifteen minutes. Then they did check the window, but no one had been around that side, the snow was unbroken. They looked about for the other missing man, Willett, without success. By the time they got in again and got out of their parkas, boots and stuff, they realized that Daboski's call was overdue." Julius looked up shaking his head, "They were both pretty demoralized by then. You can almost feel the tension coming over on the tape." Wes made no sign that he heard and he continued relating the events. "No

one answered the call to the radar cage and suddenly Crandall began to yell in the bunkroom. It comes over faintly on the tape, must have been ear splitting in person. They forced the door. Duke Crandall said that someone came to his window tapping on it and he opened it. Someone came in waving a knife, his knife, incidentally. He yelled and fought him off and the figure jumped back out the window and raced away. He couldn't identify him because he was wearing goggles, face and nose guard and the parka hood. The three of them dressed again and followed prints that led to the edge of the cliff over the strait. On their way back they found Willett, dead. Stabbed through the back. Daboski is still missing, presumably over the cliff."

Wes closed his eyes and drummed his fingers on the arm rest. Without opening them again he muttered, "Muddy, awfully muddy. Do you realize that none of them could have done it alone? And that would make two berserk men on duty on one small post, or else one nut and one agent. Messy either way."

Julius and Sgt. O'Brady exchanged glances and Wes knew they had talked about it. "Well?" he prompted when Julius hesitated.

"Well," Julius said, polishing his glasses furiously, "it's going to be bad no matter who it was, but from here, it looks like Daboski was the only one who had time enough when he was alone. He could have jumped when he knew it was up."

"By the tape, how long was it from the time Willett went out until Daboski had the opportunity to kill him?" Wes asked, still as if his mind were elsewhere, still with closed eyes.

Julius opened his notebook and did some mental figuring. "I'd have to check more thoroughly, but roughly two hours and fifteen minutes."

"And what was he doing out that long? Especially in a blizzard?" Wes grinned and shook his head. "Never mind," he said. "We have until noon to get the answer. Wake me up at Nome."

The helicopter hovered over the geodesic dome that was living quarters and storage space for the radar post contingent, to the right of it the radar and cage, and beyond, the Bering Strait; some two hundred yards away a granite cliff rose. The site looked like a giant step carved out of the cliff high over the stilled waters of the strait. Wes motioned with a circular sweep of his hand and Julius turned the craft in a wide circle, out over the strait, frozen, grey, a dull scimitar, sheenless from disuse. Glittering snow lay drifted like sand dunes, each wind ripple visible on it's shad-

owed surface. Between the buildings and the barrier cliff there were many tracks through the snow, but in spots the ground showed through, also grey. Wes nodded to Julius and the helicopter returned to the buildings and past them to settle down to earth beside a small red and white twin engined plane. The field had been wind swept clean of almost all the snow.

"Get pictures," he mouthed, not trying to speak above the helicopter noise. He motioned, encompassing the entire area, and left striding briskly toward the building where the three survivors were standing in the doorway. The two air force men stiffened to attention as he neared them.

The cold was fierce, at least fifteen below, Wes decided and returned their salutes, thinking them idiots for standing in the open door. He waved them inside and began shaking the dry snow from his shoes and trousers.

"I suppose you've had your orders," he said briskly. "I'm Colonel Aronson."

"Thomas Coriolanus, sir," said the taller of the two sergeants. He was young, twenty-five or six perhaps, blond and very frightened.

"Russell Ostler, sir," the other one said stiffly. Frightened also, there was also a look of wariness about him, of suspicion that was part of his nature. He was prematurely balding, no more than thirty-five, but older looking because of the pink dome. He had pale-blue watery eyes. Neither of them had slept, Wes remembered, but Ostler showed it more.

The third man pushed himself away from the table where he was leaning, looked hesitant about extending his hand, compromised by making a half salute with it. "I'm Duke Crandall," he said. He had the squint eyed look of a mountain man, or a bush pilot, Wes amended. His face was weathered and lined, but his eyes were piercingly aware.

"At ease," Wes said absently as the sergeants continued to stand rod-straight before him. "Let's have some coffee before we get into it." The tall sergeant got out cups and poured while Wes shrugged out of his overcoat and blew on his hands. "Thanks, Corlie," he said accepting the steaming cup.

They exchanged glances wondering how much he knew. Wes didn't enlighten them. Sitting down he motioned to them to be seated also and nodded to Corlie. "Ok, suppose you start. You saw a light?"

"Yes sir. It was snowing hard when I went out to take Frank coffee, but on my way over to the cage, it let up for a minute. It does that here, sometimes; drafts from the cliff seem to cut

it off a little while and it gets real clear. That's when I saw the light." He paused dramatically, but Wes didn't comment. "I went on to the cage and Frank was standing by the door, and I thought he saw it too. But he hadn't, and he didn't believe I had either. I gave him the coffee and returned here. But I'm certain I saw a light."

"The light, Corlie," Wes said patiently. "What kind? Where?"

"Like a flare, sir. I thought then that it was a plane crashing; my first thought about it was that a plane went down, over near the cliff. No one else saw anything and there wasn't a blip on the radar, so they didn't believe me."

The helicopter was overhead and Wes waited until it left again before he asked, "And that's when you turned on the recorder?" The gleam of triumph on Corlie's face was enough of an answer and before he could speak, Wes asked, "Where was everyone when you came back here?"

"Daboski and Willett got in that day and they were getting their stuff stowed away in the storeroom. They both came in here when I was telling Russ about the light. Duke was in the bunkroom."

"You checked?"

"Not then," Ostler answered. "Willett did a little later. He went in for his parka and stuff and locked the door when he came out. I was here, by this door and I could see Duke on the bunk. Willett put the key in his pocket. It should still be there." Ostler sat up stiffly as he spoke, and now, finished, he leaned back once more and raised his coffee cup.

"Why did Willett lock him in?"

Ostler glanced sheepishly at the quiet man. "He said something about unauthorized civilians and trouble."

The helicopter noises stopped and Wes nodded toward the coffee. "They'll want some," he suggested. Julius and Bob entered carrying cameras and developing equipment and after they thawed out, Wes asked, "Where are the bodies?"

"We put them in the storage room, sir," Corlie said quickly. "It seemed the only thing to do at the time."

"Ok," Wes said. "We'll go take a look." He motioned Corlie back down as he started to rise. "I'll be right back," he added. The three men exchanged glances hurriedly and he could feel their eyes on his back as he preceded Julius and Bob from the room.

The building was roughly divided into four sections, the sleeping quarters—one large bunkroom—and the lounging room the front half, separated by a hall, and the storage room

and kitchen in the back. The storage room was colder than the general room and Wes shivered as they entered. The bodies were on the floor, covered with sheet blankets. One of them was still dressed for outdoors, his bloodied parka thrown open, the hood partially under the body. Wes stood back and let Julius kneel beside the first, listening to his mutterings.

"Stabbed through the left abdomen region, slashed upward, nasty. Went right through parka." He rose, glanced at Wes and approached the other one. This time the parka was no longer on the man. It was beside him on the floor. Julius picked it up and glanced at it briefly before turning his attention to the man under the blanket. "He got it through the back, under right shoulder."

"Not much blood," Wes said looking at the parka with interest. He felt in the deep fur lined pockets, empty.

"Wool underwear, wool shirt, absorbed it, I guess. Out in that cold maybe he wouldn't have bled much. Died instantly, I'd guess."

Julius straightened and made a motion to pull the blanket back, but Wes stayed him frowning. "Take a look at this," he said, shoving the parka back to Julius. "Is there more than one stab wound on him?"

"Only one," Julius said, examining the parka. "Looks like the first one didn't quite make it, doesn't it? Two cuts, but this one is little more than a broken thread really."

Wes was staring at the body and abruptly he broke his stare and said, "Ok, get pictures of them. I'll want a detailed plan of this place, and the cage, and see if you can find a place to develop those prints. We have about two and a half hours to go, so hop to it." Bob was already loading his camera and didn't even look up as Wes left them to their work.

Corlie, Ostler, and Duke appeared not to have moved since he left them and without preliminary he asked Corlie, "When you returned here after seeing the light, why didn't you wait for Willett to go with you?"

"I was dressed for outside and I was already getting too hot, beginning to sweat."

"You were still here when Willett went into the bunkroom?"

"I was just going out. His stuff was in there and I knew it would be ten minutes before he'd get it all on."

"What was it like outside then?"

"About thirty-five below, snowing very hard, and blowing even harder. The snow was blinding. I remember wishing I'd got my goggles."

"Did Willett have goggles?"

"Yes sir," Ostler said. "He

dressed in the bunkroom and coming out he was fastening them on."

"So he could see better than you could out there," Wes said thoughtfully. "You didn't meet him at all outside?"

"No sir," Corlie's reply was emphatic.

"How long were you out?"

"About half an hour, more or less."

"And all you found was melted snow?"

"It had frozen again, sir," Corlie said quickly.

Wes turned to Ostler. "What was going on in here during that time?"

"Daboski and I talked about it and I told him what tricks reflections can do in a storm, and we decided that was what happened to Corlie. He called Frank Merrick and told him about them going out, and Frank was pretty angry over it. He told Daboski to come on over and relieve him. Then Corlie came back."

"Daboski left then? Did he have to go into the bunkroom for his parka?"

"No sir," Ostler said. "He'd been out looking around earlier and his stuff was in the alcove, where we always hang them when we come in. Willett's weren't there because he hadn't gone out since getting here. I went with Daboski, sir."

"Why?"

"We were all concerned when Willett didn't return. He was new and we didn't like the idea of having him wandering about in that weather. I was going to look for him, but Merrick was already dressed and he went with me."

At this the bush pilot snorted and to Wes's questioning look he exclaimed bitterly, "I'm the only one here who was fit to go out there and find anything, but these damn fools kept me locked up. What they don't know about searching during a blizzard!"

Wes shrugged and turned back to Ostler. "You and Merrick stay together?"

"No sir. We went to the end of the cliff and then he came back—or was supposed to come back—by way of the edge and I was to stick closer to the cliff. We were to zig-zag. If we didn't find him, Corlie and Daboski were to go out and use our steps to guide them in the same way until we covered all the area."

"So that left you in here and Daboski in the cage?" Wes commented looking at Corlie. "Right?"

"Yes sir. Daboski called me and told me what they were doing and we talked several minutes. Then after about twenty minutes I called back and this time we talked until Russ came back."

"This was about an hour and a half since Willett left," Wes

said, not asking. "Ok, then you went out and found Merrick's body, right?"

"That's right, sir. We were going to check on the window to the bunkroom. The door was still locked, but too much was happening and we just wanted to make sure. Frank . . . his body was right outside the storeroom door."

"You checked the window?"

"After we brought Frank inside and made sure . . . We went back out and far enough around the building to see that the snow hadn't been broken there."

"Why were you so determined to keep Crandall locked in?" Wes asked suddenly.

Corlie looked helplessly at Ostler who averted his eyes. "It's on the tape anyway," Corlie said. "It was something Willett said when he first got here. He said places like this, top secret and all, shouldn't allow cr . . . guys like him in."

"Did he give a reason for his feeling?" Wes studied the bush pilot's craggy face as Corlie hesitated again. The pilot seemed almost amused.

"No sir," Corlie admitted.

"I know," Crandall said simply. "He kept bugging me in the cockpit coming in and I told him to get the hell out and leave me do the flying."

"What precisely was the trouble?" Wes asked crisply.

"He thought I was flying too low, probably off course. He didn't know."

"Were you?"

"Hell no! Flight plan was checked out by one of your own boys at Nome and I got radar clearance all the way."

"Ok, so then you reported in, didn't you?" Wes asked Corlie, dismissing the pilot entirely for the moment.

"After we called Daboski. While I was talking to him Russ coded the message and then sent it. Major Karen had us wait for an answer and then he said we should all get together and stay until further orders. I called Daboski again, but this time no one answered."

"And Duke began to yell," Ostler added quickly.

Duke was slumped down in his chair, long, rangy legs stretched out before him, only his eyes, brilliant and glittering, betrayed his interest. Wes recognized in him the same type man he had grown up with back in Colorado, lean, hardened, built to endure, used to quick effortless decisions during emergencies, long deliberations otherwise. "You didn't know you would be here overnight?"

"Hell no!" Duke answered. "I was to fly some in and some out, only the snow came."

"So if the replacement hadn't become ill and the snow hadn't come up unexpectedly, you

would have flown Corlie, Ostler and Merrick out."

The pilot shrugged noncommitally, but Ostler said, "You had some engine trouble, didn't you? Someone mentioned it."

Duke looked puzzled for a second and then remembered. "There was a noise back around take-off, but by the time we landed, I had forgotten it."

"Ok," Wes said. "Back to last night. You went to bed early. Why?"

Duke grinned briefly. "Reckon I could take a hint," he drawled.

"And you went right to sleep?"

"Yep, always do soon as I go to bed."

Wes nodded. He too had learned to go to sleep instantly, when the opportunity arose, not according to the clock, necessarily. "And you didn't hear anything unusual?"

"Not knowing what was unusual, I couldn't say. I heard them moving about, and I heard Willett getting into his stuff, but I wasn't interested. Thought he was going on duty. But when someone came tapping on my window, I thought that a bite too big to swallow."

"That's what woke you up?"

"That's it. Someone was tapping on the window. I got up and opened it and he came climbing in, muttering like a fool, waving a knife at me. My knife, at that. And it had blood on it. I tried to get it talking quiet like to him, but he wasn't having any of that, and he came at me. I yelled and picked up a chair to swing at him, but he turned and hightailed it out the window again. Ostler and Coriolanus had the door open by then and we all got dressed and went out to find him. We didn't, though. We found Willett."

Julius came in then and nodded to Wes that they were finished with the pictures. He left again and Wes walked to the door and watched him enter the bunkroom. He could see the bunks from the doorway. Turning again to the men, he asked, "Was Willett frozen?"

There was a long silence and finally Corlie said wonderingly, "No, not a bit! He wasn't frozen at all."

Wes frowned at them, standing by the door. He nodded once and asked Duke, "Where did your attacker get your knife?"

"Damned if I know. I thought it was in the sheath on my belt. I had it when we came in, hung it up with my parka."

Wes walked to the alcove and found the belt tossed over a hanger. It was fitted with goggles, a flash light, and the empty sheath. Duke nodded when he held it up.

"And you didn't see it again?"

"Not until he came at me with it." Corlie and Ostler shook their heads when Wes turned toward them questioningly.

"Ok," Wes said. "Stay here."

In the kitchen Bob had spread the prints out on a long table and he was going over them with a magnifying glass, making notes as he looked. Julius was finishing a sketch of the housing unit, another one of the radar buildings was beside it. They both rose when Wes entered.

"It's a good one," he said absently. "Got anything?"

Julius shrugged. "Not much," he admitted. "No sign of a flare or a drop, but it could have been. Someone clever with snow and a shovel could have hidden anything out there. Would have taken time. Foot prints all over the place."

Wes nodded and turned to the sergeant. "How about you, Bob?"

"Pretty much the same story, sir. The only clear prints in the whole mess are those leading to and away from the window of the bunkroom. Here they are." He handed a picture to Wes. It had been taken from the helicopter and showed the prints leading from the main walk between the cage and the dome, and then back again. After he finished with it, Bob handed him a second, close-up, picture of the same prints. "You can see how much deeper they are going back, when he was running."

Wes studied them carefully and then slammed his fist down on the table. "It just doesn't add up," he muttered. He walked to the window and stared out deep in thought. Wheeling about abruptly he ordered in a sure voice, "There has to be a drop! I hate to send you out again, Bob, but we have to know. Get the metal detector and look around with it. Take the aerial photo and try the likeliest places first, nearer the cliff, probably. If you find anything, don't touch it!"

The sergeant was already pulling on his thick outer pants and only grunted as he struggled into them. Wes clapped him on the back and paced the length of the kitchen several moments. "It could be Daboski," he said slowly without relish.

"But you don't believe it," Julius finished.

"I don't believe it," Wes agreed. Bob had finished dressing and left quietly and Wes sat down opposite Julius. "Corlie saw the light; let's start with him. He was out alone and could have got Willett, only Willett wasn't killed then, or he would have been frozen. Corlie couldn't have got him inside here without being heard. He was talking to Daboski when Merrick got it. He's covered until Ostler got back and they were together after that. Even if he could have slipped out and killed Merrick, he couldn't have got Willett. Same goes for Ostler. He was with Corlie when Willett got the knife." He scowled at the

many pictures on the table unseeingly.

"That just leaves Daboski," Julius pointed out.

"Yeah. So he talked to Corlie, ran out and just happened to catch Merrick at the back door, and rushed back to the cage in time for them to call him again. Then he had to leave again to make the attempt at Duke and somewhere along the way, he had to run into Willett. Hell!" He tilted his chair back and stared moodily at the ceiling. "And where the hell could Willett have been all that time?"

Julius was polishing a new curve in his glasses and finally put them on again. "If there was a drop," he said hesitantly, "Willett was the only one who had time to pick it up and conceal it. He could have killed Merrick and when Daboski got wise somehow they fought and this time Willett was killed. Maybe he was the one Duke saw and then met Daboski. Remember Daboski was new here, in his confusion he might have run the wrong way, in the snow and all. He could have gone over the cliff accidentally."

They both looked up as Bob came hurrying in. They couldn't see his face because of the goggles, and the mouth and nose cover of his parka, but there was an exultant bounce to his walk, and even before he snapped off the dark glasses and flung his hood back, Wes knew he had found it.

"Over by the cliff," Bob gasped. "He really did a job on it! Can't spot a thing visually, until you know. But the detector says metal."

"How near did you get?" Wes demanded.

"About four feet. Didn't change my direction or anything. Looks like someone just passed by. Lots of prints in the area. Looks ok."

"Good," Wes said softly and for the first time there was a gleam of certainty in his eyes. "Julius get a call through to Denver. I want Willett's past history, where he's been, where he grew up, who he knows, everything, and I want it five minutes ago. No codes."

Julius snapped a quick salute, grinning. "Was I right?" he asked, his hand on the door.

"You said it yourself, boy. Now hop!"

He paced several more times the length of the room and then said to Bob, "I want four things: wet clothes, a pair of goggles, a bloodstained something—I don't know what, rags, shirt, something—and a knife, about so long, probably whale bone or ivory handle. The goggles and rags should be in this area." He indicated it on the map-sketch Julius had drawn locating the bodies as well as the buildings.

Bob left again unquestioningly and Wes stalked the kitchen until

Julius returned with a sheet of paper in his hand. He was crestfallen and, wordlessly, he handed the paper to Wes. "Well, you don't seem surprised," he said when Wes glanced at it and put it in his pocket. "The plane should be here in less than an hour. I guess it's back to Denver for us."

"Un huh," Wes grinned. "You know the orders. If we can't resolve it satisfactorily before the plane gets here, we're to return to Denver with the suspects, otherwise we are to report and a counter-agent takes over."

"You knew Willett had never been up here before?"

"I suspected. Come on, I have to play it out before that plane gets here. Just hope Bob comes up with what I need."

The three men were sitting quietly when Wes opened the door, but at his approach Corlie jumped up and asked, "Was it Willett, sir? Was he the one?"

"The one what, Sergeant?" Wes asked coldly. Corlie sat down again baffled by the chill in the colonel's voice. Expressionlessly Wes said, "Here's what I'll report: Sergeant Willett went outside to investigate an alleged light. You've all mentioned his unwarranted suspicions of Crandall; he was the sort who'd swallow whole the idea of a subversive up here. He found nothing, because there was nothing. But he did manage to create an aura of hysteria by his prolonged absence. He met Merrick by the back door and killed him, probably because Merrick was trying to force him inside. Then he came around to get at Crandall, the one he was really after, probably, but he was frightened away. Then he met Daboski. Maybe he attacked Daboski; we'll never know why they fought, but this time, he got it. Remember Daboski was new, and he was panicked. He ran and in his confusion he went off the cliff."

"But how do you know Willett didn't find anything?" Corlie demanded belligerently, remembered he was out-ranked and belatedly added, "Sir."

"Because we didn't," Wes snapped. "Willett was a city boy, a Chicago boy. He'd never been north in his life until now. It takes experience to go out in a storm and locate something and then conceal it again."

"If he was a spy," Duke objected thoughtfully, "he could have been taught how to take care of it in snow."

"Mr. Crandall," Wes said darkly, "how far can you fly with a hole in your gas tank?"

Duke half rose from his chair and then subsided scowling.

"You're covering for Willett!" Ostler gasped. "He really was a spy and you're covering for him! Daboski must have caught on."

"Would it do any good to ex-

pose a dead man?" Wes grated, his jaw rigid, his grey eyes like frosted chips of granite. "Would it undo anything? Would it help the Air Force?" He looked at his watch pointedly. "The replacements are going to arrive in about half an hour and you'll all be flown out, but the investigation will continue. My recommendation will bear considerable weight in what direction it takes. Think about it, gentlemen."

He stalked from the room without a backward glance, Julius at his heels, a small frown worrying at his forehead, vanishing and returning.

"Why'd you do that?" he asked in a bewildered voice when they were again in the kitchen.

"There's a spy, all right. Don't underrate him, Julius. We needed a fall guy who fitted the evidence. Our boy would have come to realize sooner or later that one of us would start to wonder what Willett was doing so long, and the only way to make his absence acceptable is by making him it."

"It figures," Julius admitted.

They turned to the door as Bob entered. "Find anything?" Wes asked. There was a trace of apprehension in his voice.

"No goggles, no knife. A sheet blanket, like the ones over the bodies. About where you said, covered with snow. I left it there."

Wes nodded. "That figures, too," he said to Julius.

"And some damp clothes," Bob concluded. Wes couldn't conceal the gleam that leaped in his eyes. "Hanging in the bunkroom closet I found a heavy wool shirt with a hood on it, and ski pants, not dripping, but traces of moisture in the seams. That what you wanted?"

"That's the fourth Ace, Bob," Wes said quietly. "Fix them something to eat while Julius and I send a message. Keep them in here."

It took twenty minutes to code and send off the message, and another five to receive the answer that accepted Wes' decisions. He stood again in the doorway to the kitchen. "Well, gentlemen," he asked, "does my story make a little more sense after thinking about it?"

Duke shrugged. "None of my business," he growled. "You guys look after your own any way you like."

Corlie and Ostler looked at one another and stood at attention. It was Corlie, as usual, who acted as spokesman. "Yes sir," he said, looking directly ahead, not at the colonel. "I couldn't swear that I really saw a light, sir."

"Exactly," Wes murmured. "Now I think I hear the plane coming. You'll report to headquarters at Nome and await the official statement that will re-

quire your signatures. And, Mr. Crandall, you, I believe, live in Nome. If you will be kind enough to remain there a day or so until we clear this up for the record . . ."

"Sure," Duke said eyeing him with distaste. "Like I said, it's none of my business."

After the small red and white plane was gone, flown out by an Air Force lieutenant, Wes and his aides began gathering their equipment. Wes had briefed the intelligence man in charge and, as far as he was concerned, the rest of it was routine and he was through. Several times he caught Bob's eyes on him in mute questioning and finally he sat down at the table and motioned the sergeant to do likewise. "Ok, Bob," he said, "what is it?"

"Sir, was it really Willett?"

Julius frowned as a second major stopped in the doorway to stare at the colonel and sergeant talking at the table. Wes scowled back and said, "Julius put his finger on it when he said Willett was the only one who had time to get the stuff and hide it. He knew where to go find it, and he knew how to hide it."

"But he couldn't have," Bob said.

Julius grinned sourly and crossed the room to screen the seated sergeant from the doorway.

"I know that," Wes agreed. "I knew from the first because Merrick was ordered to remain with the new men. That meant neither Daboski nor Willett had experience in the north country." There was no answering light in Bob's face and he sighed, "Think back, Bob. How was Willett dressed when he came out of the bunkroom?"

"For outside. Parka, boots, face guard, goggles."

"But you just don't put on dark goggles until you actually go out," Wes pointed out and Bob's expression changed from incomprehension to amazement.

"Duke!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly. He knew he would be there for the drop. He had prepared to stay by mentioning engine noise, but then the storm came and there wasn't any doubt about his staying. He must have had his belt in the bunkroom all the time and when Willett came in to dress he stabbed him and took his place. He knew they'd never allow him to go get the stuff with Willett voicing suspicions of him right and left, so the murder was doubly ordered. Then he went out right past them and no one gave it a second thought. They knew Duke was locked in and that was that."

"And the rest is like you said only it was Duke, not Willett. But why did he pretend someone came to his window?"

"He had to get Willett out of his bunk. When he killed Mer-

rick he must have come inside and when Ostler and Corlie went out to check on his window he got back in the bunkroom. He heard them calling Daboski, knew they'd get him up too, so they could all be together as ordered. He had to get rid of the body fast. He carried Willett out, using the clothes you found still damp, and dumped him, ran into Daboski and, I'd guess, slugged him and tossed him over the cliff. Maybe he thought Daboski's disappearance would complicate things even more, give him more time. Then he went back to the bunkroom and got out of the borrowed clothes. He had to risk using them because he had to dress Willett in his own before taking him out, and that explains the cuts in Willett's parka, by the way. I bet when we find his knife we'll find that it didn't cut those holes, but that a smaller pocket knife did them. He probably tossed his own over the cliff after Daboski to emphasize that Daboski actually killed Willett."

"So finding the blood stained blanket cinched it," Bob said looking pleased with himself. "But why did you tell me to look for goggles? Duke had them back on his belt."

"I was hoping you wouldn't find any others. If you had, it could have meant that they really were Willett's. More than whether or not Willett had his own it would have thrown doubt on whether Duke had the belt in the bunkroom after all. The whole thing came back to opportunity. Either he had the belt with the knife and goggles with him before Willett was killed, or he really was locked in like they thought. But the goggles had to be between the window and where Willett was killed, and they weren't."

"What about the stuff that was dropped?" Julius asked suddenly.

"Thank God that's not my problem," Wes said fervently. "But whatever they do, you can bet Duke Crandall is going to serve his country better in the next years than he ever has before." He rose and drew his coat on and Bob picked up his equipment once more and left the room. "Now, Julius," Wes said, "let's see if that egg beater of yours is frozen to the ground. It seems to me that I'm overdue on a leave."

WHAT'S NEW IN CRIME?

Reviews of recent novels including Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice's PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE

WILL APPEAR NEXT MONTH

APRIL IN PARIS

by ANN GILMER

MADAME ARNEL thought it the most beautiful spring day she'd ever known. Not only because of the balmy, warm weather but tomorrow would see her rid of her completely undesirable niece.

To celebrate the occasion they were having this special little dinner in advance of the regular wedding party. She'd had no trouble persuading Claude, her penny-pinching husband, to arrange the affair, he was so pleased to see the last of Marie. Her dowry did them no good since her late parents had legally tied it up to be paid directly to her husband.

Madame had just returned from the kitchen and a final check of the *coc au vin* which was to be the entree for the fine dinner when her husband approached her, perspiring and anxious: "Have you told him yet?" he whispered hoarsely.

Madame Arnel glanced worriedly at the prospective bride and groom, talking animatedly together at the other end of the room. Such a devoted pair. She, very plain, and he a little older and almost bald, but still!

"Do it now!" her husband insisted.

Madame Arnel called the groom aside. "There is one thing you must know. I have put it off until now. Not wanting to mention such a disturbing matter."

The prospective groom showed alarm. "Yes?"

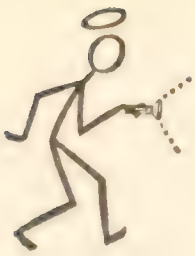
Madame Arnel continued nervously. "Perhaps it is nothing. My husband insists you should know. My poor dear Marie's mother was a murderess. It was in all the papers at the time but we have kept it from her."

The groom-to-be looked relieved. "Is that all?" He drew out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration beads from his temples and two tickets dropped to the floor.

Quickly Madame Arnel picked them up. "I know it must be a shock," she told the bald, nervous-looking man with his pointed black beard. "But there is no reason to believe Marie is tainted. I'm sure you'll agree?"

The bald man nodded with a gentle smile. And held out his hand for the tickets.

Madame Arnel sighed a prodigious relief. Then she glanced at the tickets and began to laugh: "Your honeymoon tickets, one one-way and one round trip! You are absent-minded, eccentric in so many ways! But you make it all up by being so understanding, dear Henri-Desire Landru!"



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the wolfram hunters

by Edward D. Hoch

Now in the ninth decade after the Bomb, when the war which had ravaged the earth was almost forgotten, there lived in the upper valley of the Rio Grande a tribe of Indians that had once —in more glorious days—been Apaches, It was not a large tribe, and in the little village called Del Norte there were perhaps no more than two hundred souls.

One of these was the child Running, who passed his days playing and climbing among the foothills much as children everywhere had done in the old days. If there was any difference between Running and these children of the past, it was only that he was alive. Very early in life, certainly before he was seven, Running learned of the old man who lived up in the mountains, a cave-dwelling ogre who easily became the subject of parental threat and childhood legend. "I'll send you to the man on the mountain," parents would say when trying to scare obedience into their offspring. "Be good or the man on the mountain will get you!"

We have no way of knowing what the world will be like in the years and the centuries to come. We like to think that we may in time reach the stars. Perhaps we will. There is also the possibility that the opposite will happen. But whatever does come to be, human nature is not likely to change. and there will undoubtedly still be men such as Father Legion. One hopes . . .

But after he'd passed a certain threshold of age—was it seven or eight or nine?—he realized in a burst of enlightenment that there was nothing to fear from this cave-dwelling creature. The older boys initiated him into the terrors of the cave one stormy night in summer, by the simple expedient of dragging him to its mouth and hurling him inside. The cave in which Running found himself was low and narrow at its entrance, but it soon broadened out into a sort of room where a boy or even a man could stand and walk upright without discomfort.

And the man he found there was far from the horrible bearded ancient he'd come to imagine in his dreams. He was rather a tall and not unhandsome Indian of perhaps forty years, a man who came to greet Running with a smile and an outstretched hand. "You are brave to come here on such a stormy night," he said, and when Running took an uncertain step backward, he added quickly, "Don't be afraid. I am only a man like the others in the valley."

Running summoned all his courage and asked, "Who are you? Why do you live here alone?"

"My name is Legion," he said quietly. "Father Legion. I am a priest, and that is the reason why I must live here, away from other men."

"A priest?" He had heard them mentioned, vaguely, as something that had vanished with the cities and the airplanes and the sea and the rest of it. Vanished with the bursting of the Bombs. "I didn't know there were any left," he told the man.

"I believe I am the only one. At least I am the only one at Del Norte, little friend. But tell me, what is your name?"

"Running."

"Running? I like that name. It is a good name, swift and powerful. What do you know of the far world, little Running? What do you know of the past?"

"Only what they tell me in the councils," Running said, a bit uncertainly. "I am still too young to be initiated into all the mysteries."

The priest smiled at Running as a father would, and said, "Let me tell you about our people, and about the great war that killed so many. Let me tell you why we alone have survived, and how the unfortunate ignorance of a few is perhaps dooming us all to eventual oblivion."

The words, some of them, were strange to the ears of Running, accustomed as he was only to the half-grunted monosyllables of the tribe. But the voice of the priest was gentle, and there was meaning to what he said. Running did not learn it all

on the first visit, or the second, but during the months that followed he came again and again to the cave in the hills, and gradually the story of their civilization took shape in his ear and mind and memory.

"Nearly a hundred years ago," Father Legion told him, "men lived in big cities, and flew planes through the air, and even ventured as far as the moon you see in the heavens. There were good men and bad men, and sometimes it was difficult to tell which was which. Anyway, presently there came a great war, and rockets fell from the skies all over the world. These rockets, and their Bombs, released something called radiation. It killed people, all people, sometimes at once and sometimes weeks or months later. And here in America everyone died . . . everyone but the Indians"

"But why did we alone live?" Running asked. *Why,* the eternal question.

"We don't exactly know that answer," Father Legion explained, "but of course it must have had something to do with the pigment in our skin. It acted as a natural barrier to the radiation that killed the white man. The other races of the world—the Negro, the Oriental—were not so fortunate. They died too, and only the brown men—that odd mixture of all the races—remained. I suppose in a way it was destined by some greater Power, for now the country which had been our God-given homeland was returned to us."

"But why don't we go to live in the cities?" Running asked one day during their conversation.

"Because, little one, the cities are mostly in ruins. And where buildings remain, the radiation may still be too high even for the Indian to survive. We do not have the intricate measuring devices necessary to be certain of safety. We know only that we have been safe for three generations here at Del Norte, and so we remain here."

"But what about you? Why do you live up here?"

"After the Bomb, a great many people gave up any consolation that religion might have offered them. In those final days of blind fury, churches were burned and priests were slaughtered in the streets, and truly it seemed to the survivors as if the end of the world had finally come to pass. But as I said, the Indians survived. Rather than being thankful to God for this survival, they reflected the sins of the white man. The few Indian priests were not killed, but they were driven into the hills." He paused a moment, as if seeing it all once more on some giant screen before his eyes. "And so

we have lived out our years in places like this, worshipping God and searching out others—boys like yourself—to take our place when the time comes."

"I don't want to," Running said quickly, suddenly feeling a bolt of fear through his young body. "I don't want to be like you and live in this cave all my life!"

"Come, come. I'm not asking you to, am I? A boy like you was born to run and play and enjoy life too much to be content up here. I am only telling you a story, because this is something all of you should know.

"Why don't you come down and tell the others, then?" Running asked, playing absently with a stone that was smooth and cool to his touch.

"Because they will not have me. They let me live, probably because their superstitious natures kept them from killing me—or those who came before me. They let me live, if only to serve as a frightening example to bad children. And instead of rebuilding a lost civilization, they spend their days in search of wolfram."

Running knew of the quest for the precious metal, a quest which was carried out only by the warriors of the tribe. Each day they went off into the hills, never wandering too far from the valley, but searching, ever searching for the dark stones of their strange destiny. "Why do they search?" Running asked.

"Because wolfram is the source of the metal tungsten, and in their half-memories of the world as it was, they connect it with electricity and electric lights."

"Electric lights?"

Father Legion nodded. "Once whole cities glowed with light, my son, and it was the light of a million candles. But the light had to be generated. There is no magic in the metal wolfram that will bring it back." And he shook his head sadly, adding half to himself, "Such a long way to fall in only ninety years."

Finally, the annual feast of Easter drew near, and Running was as busy as the others with the preparations for it. The tribal leader, Volyon, was everywhere at once, instructing, ordering, planning. The year's precious gathering of wolfram had to be collected and treated for the ceremonies. And most important of all, the prisoners must be annointed and prepared for execution. It was this last part of the annual ceremonies which drew from Father Legion the greatest condemnation, and Running had never seen him as angry as the afternon they talked of it.

"A blasphemous, profane thing!" the priest told him. "To crucify these men in the manner of Christ!"

"They are criminals," Running argued, because he could see nothing wrong in the annual custom which never failed to provide a few days' excitement.

"Some of them are murderers." Father Legion admitted. "But more are simply poor men who drank too much or had the wrong friends. To keep them penned up during the whole year and then to put them to death at Easter time—and such a death!"

"Our leader Volyon says it is a religious death," Running replied, but for the first time he wondered if a doubt had crossed his mind. For the few years he could remember well, the annual observance had been the high point of the year. But he had to admit cruelty in the proceedings. Any member of the village of two-hundred-odd who committed a crime during the year was arrested, tried by a council of elders, and imprisoned. Thus a man might spend up to a year in jail before the fatal day of his execution arrived. And the horrible penalty of crucifixion was meted out for a variety of offences ranging from murder and rape to the stealing of wolfram and sleeping on guard duty.

"It is a perversion of religion," Father Legion insisted, and he told Running the story of the Christ, as it had been told by so many through the centuries.

And when he'd finished, Running asked, "You learned all this from the priest ahead of you?"

"And the priest ahead of him," Father Legion said with a little nod. And then, almost to himself, he added, "I suppose I am a bishop really, or perhaps even the Pope, if I am truly the last one left." Then, louder, "How old are you, my son?"

"Nearly ten, I think."

"And you have been coming here since last summer, listening to me talk. Surely a boy your age would rather run and play with the others."

"No, no," Running said, barely believing the words himself. "I would rather be here with you."

And so that evening again Running returned to the settlement in the valley, by the shores of the river, and as before he spoke to no one about his meeting with the priest in the cave, or about the strange and wonderful things he was learning there. His mother and sisters were busy with the Easter preparations, and his father was up in the hills with the wolfram hunters.

On the following day, Running saw that the terrible rite about which Father Legion had spoken was beginning its annual re-enactment on the hill, before his eyes. The prisoners—there were nine of them—were brought before the tribal leader, Volyon. Very carefully he read the sen-

tences, which all of them knew so well already. One man, Crow, was a murderer, and he accepted the death sentence with eyes downcast at the dusty earth. Another, Raincloud, who had stolen another man's allotment of wolfram, cried out to his brothers and relatives as he was led to one of the nine wooden crosses. His mother tried to break through the line of guards, but they held her back.

The rest was a nightmare, clouding the mind of Running, terrifying him as it never had before. Towards the end, when the last of the nine was being lashed to his cross, Running looked away, back toward the little line of frame houses. But even in this vista there was no escaping the sight or sound of it. He saw that final cross reflected in a broken window-pane, saw it distorted by the cracked glass into a shattered image of life, and death. He closed his eyes tightly as the last of the nine screamed out his fright in the face of death, then stopped suddenly in mid-scream as the ceremonial arrows found his naked chest.

Afterward, when the nine condemned men had become simply nine punctured corpses hanging from their crosses on the hilltop, Volyon left the warrior Samely on guard and led the other back down to the village. Still the relatives of the executed men cried and screamed, for the idea of death is difficult to accept, even with many months to prepare for it. These families knew now that their loved ones were dead with bodies fated to hang up there for many days until the sun and the buzzards had done their work, until the lesson had been well learned by those who remained.

But even in a village as small as this, Running knew there would be more men to die next Easter. And perhaps a woman too. There had been a woman last year. He had never known her crime for sure, but the others had spoken of it in whispers. This night he hid in a remote corner of the house and took no part in the rites as he had that previous year. This night he covered his ears against the sounds of Volyon's prayers and the singing of the warrior Mancoat. He heard his father return to the house once for more of the grain spirits they drank on such occasions, but still he did not stir. The hour grew late, and dark and presently quiet. And Running slept.

In the morning the village woke slowly to the cares of a new day. There were more ceremonies, including the offering of the wolfram to Volyon, and his own symbolic offering in turn to heaven, but for Running there

was still the memory of the men on the hill. He ran up early to see them, praying perhaps that they would be still alive, or at least finally buried. But the nine crosses still stood in the morning sun, and when he came too close Samely chased him away with a wave of his spear.

Running remembered stories of guns that fired bullets, and for many years after the Bomb the Indians had continued to use such weapons. Now, though, the bullets were gone, used up, and the tribe had reverted to the bow and arrow and the spear. Running had seen a rifle once, dust-covered in his uncle's house, but he had been afraid to touch it.

He played on the hill for a time with the other boys, and they wrestled around, showing off for the guards who took time out from their duties to watch. No one even remembered now what the valley was guarded against, whether the unknown enemy of long ago had been dying white men, or other Indians, or even Mexicans up from the south. The enemy had never come, whoever he was, though someone like Father Legion would have claimed he was already there.

Towards noon Running noticed a disturbance in the village, and as he drew nearer he heard the voice of Mancoat's wife pleading with Volyon. "I have looked everywhere," she said. "My husband has disappeared."

She was a pretty woman named Airing, very popular with the men of the village, and even Running was aware of the care Mancoat always took in watching over her. Now Volyon placed a comforting arm around her shoulders, and said, "I am sure he will turn up, little one. He was with me last night, and his voice was raised to the heavens in song."

"But where *is* he?"

"Perhaps he has gone in search of more wolfram."

But Airing shook her head. "You need not tell me that, Volyon. You well know that no one goes after wolfram during the holidays."

"Anyway, come with me," he said. "We will ask the guards."

Running watched them go off, and then ran down to the house to tell his mother and father and sisters of this strange development. No one had ever disappeared from the village before. Where was there to disappear?

By nightfall the village was in an uproar. Volyon personally had led a search of all the houses when the guards had reported no one leaving the area, but no trace of the missing man had been found. Running was standing nearby when he heard one of the ancient warriors, Treetop, say to Volyon, "What about the

priest's cave? That has not been searched."

Volyon nodded and raised his spear high in the air, motioning for the search group to follow. They made their way along the hillside until at last they reached the half-hidden little cave, and Running followed in the darkness unnoticed.

Father Legion had heard their approach, and now he appeared in the entrance, holding high his torch. The flickering flamelight played on the faces of those who had gathered around him. "What is it you want?" he asked coldly.

Treetop started to speak, but Volyon signalled him to silence. "Oh, priest, we come in search of Mancoat who has disappeared. His wife Airing is greatly worried."

Father Legion stared hard at Volyon. "You may search my home if you wish," he said.

While the others searched, old Treetop drew close and said, 'I remember you as a boy. I will always remember you as a boy."

The priest nodded. "This is something I have to do," he said. "You wouldn't understand."

"Neither would your mother," the old warrior said, turning away.

They searched the cave carefully, but found no evidence that Mancoat had been there. Finally, discouraged, they filed back down the hillside. But Running remained with the priest for a time, and asked him, "Who is Treetop, Father Legion? He knows you from long ago."

"He was very close to me at one time," the priest answered. "He was my father."

And after a time Running followed the others down the hill, because there didn't seem to be any more to say.

In the morning, he was surprised to see Father Legion coming down the hill to the village, accompanied by one of the stately guards. He had never seen the priest in the village before, and he feared what this might mean. But Father Legion went directly to the house of Volyon, which was the largest in the valley. When Running saw that the tribal leader was not at home, he ran quickly to the side of the priest, feeling the stones sharp and smooth beneath his hardened feet.

"Father Legion, I think he still searches for the missing Mancoat."

"Thank you, Running," the priest said, brushing the hair on the boy's head with a kindly hand. "I came to see him about that matter."

"You saw the men they executed, Father Legion?"

The priest glanced up at the far hill, where nine crosses still stood outlined in the first rays

of morning-light. "Yes," he said quietly. "I saw them."

From somewhere Mancoat's wife Airing appeared, still close to tears. There seemed no way to comfort her, short of finding her missing husband. "Where is Volyon?" she asked.

"I seek him myself," the priest told her.

"I . . . I fear that Mancoat is dead. I have this awful feeling that someone has murdered him. The men of the village, they look at me so oddly. It is a look one reserves for widows."

"Who looked at you that way?"

"Many people. One was the brother of Raincloud, who hangs up there. She motioned towards the hill without looking. "Could someone have killed Mancoat and thrown him into the river?"

Their eyes sought the water at her words, but the stream ran shallow for the springtime. "No," Father Legion said softly, but perhaps . . ."

At that moment, Volyon came, followed closely by old Treetop and some others. "The priest!" Volyon exclaimed, startled. Treetop looked away.

"I have come to talk of many things," Father Legion said.

Volyon nodded. "We can talk here, on my porch. The sun is good today."

"Have you found Mancoat?" his wife asked.

"No . . . not yet."

"He's dead! I know he's dead!"

Volyon motioned to old Treetop, who placed a gnarled hand of comfort on the girl. Father Legion took the opportunity to motion Running to one side. "Young Running, could you do me a great favour?"

"Anything, Father Legion."

"You see that man pausing for bath water from the river?"

"Karlong, brother of the dead Raincloud."

"Correct. Follow him for me, and report to me where he goes."

"But . . ."

"No questions now, little one. Be quick!"

Then he turned back to Volyon and the others, and Running had to hurry on to his mission. The tall Karlong, a great beast of a man, had already rounded the corner of a house with his burden of bath water, but oddly enough he seemed headed away from the village proper. Running tried to follow in a casual manner, skipping as if in play through occasional sections of tall grass. But the big man was on his guard. He looked back constantly, frowning once when he caught sight of Running.

Soon, though, he reached his destination, a section of flatland hidden from the view of the village. It was a desolate area where Running had only rarely ventured, even in play. Here even the trees seemed dead, for

this was the village's burial ground.

And as Karlong poured his carefully carried water upon the grass in one particular area, Running suddenly realized the truth—what better place to hide a body than in a burial ground? Karlong had killed Mancoat and hidden his body here, and now he was watering the grass upon the grave.

Then Karlong saw him.

He turned to run, but the big man was fast in pursuit. He could almost feel the hot breath of doom on his back as he ran higher, ever higher up the hill. If only he could reach one of the guard positions before Karlong caught him. If only . .

He had not been named Running for nothing. His feet were swift and his legs worked hard, reminding him of the pictures of pistons he'd seen once in a book at Volyon's great library. Karlong still followed, panting, but now the gap between them had widened and Running knew he would not be caught. Over the next hill and he would be safe for sure. He topped it and saw Samely standing guard near the nine crosses with their burdens. He paused for breath and looked behind him. Karlong had given up the chase and was heading back towards the village.

"What are you doing, boy?" Samely called out to him.

"Only playing." Running stooped and gathered a few pebbles in his hand, and went hopping off down the hill, in pretended search for some unlucky rabbit or gopher.

Back at Volyon's house, he saw that Father Legion was still conferring with their leader. The two sat close together, like old friends, but even Running could see that their conversation was anything but friendly. He crept closer to listen.

"You want us to backtrack, return to the white man's way of life?" Volyon was saying. "He lived in his great cities while the Indian nearly starved on reservations. He treated us like cattle, something to be herded here and there, to be settled in one spot until the government neded the land for a new highway or a power project, then shunted off once more to some new and more crowded life elsewhere. You want us to build towards that sort of life again?"

"But with an Indian civilization, how could it happen?" Father Legion asked, his voice still calm.

"With an Indian civilization we would only find someone else to dominate. Perhaps we would find some lost group of Mexicans whom we could force from their land."

Father Legion stirred in his chair. "You are a wise man, Vol-

yon. Wiser than I had thought. You realize that the sins you mention are the sins of civilization rather than the sins of the white man alone."

Volyon's temper cooled. "We both know much of the past, Father Legion. You were wise even as a child, and I can understand in a way your decision to join Father Blaming up on the hill. He was a good man too. I am sorry he is dead."

"You could at least give me a chance to live down here again, back among your people and mine."

"As a priest?"

"Of course."

"It would only end in bloodshed."

"I don't think so."

"What could you give them that they don't already have? Besides your white man's civilization?"

". . . A knowledge of God"

"And what would that do for them?"

"It might prevent things like this," Father Legion said, gesturing towards the distant hill.

"Do you want to prevent that? Do you want those men running loose to rob and kill again?"

"Is this sort of punishment any determent? To leave them hanging there until their bodies rot in the sun, or are eaten by the buzzards?"

"You ask if it is a deterring factor and I answer you. Last Easter there were eleven bodies hanging there, and the year before that there were fifteen."

"Can we afford the loss of such a percentage of our population?" Father Legion asked.

Volyon shrugged. "Crime must be punished. By my methods, not by yours."

"The man who vanished — Mancoat — has not been found? Suppose I locate him for you."

"We have searched the entire village, and the hills. As you well know. If we could not find him, how will you be able to?"

"*If* I find him," the priest persisted, "would you agree to let me live in peace in the village? And instruct the people?"

Volyon was silent for a long time. He seemed to be staring off towards the distant hills, considering his answer. "Very well," he said finally. "If you find Mancoat, you can return to the village in peace. But I warn you that the people will never listen."

"All I ask is a chance to speak to them. The civilization I spoke of will not come overnight, but a start must be made."

"You really think it will be better this time? Better than before the Bomb?"

Father Legion looked down at the rough wooden floor. "It has to be, or God wouldn't have saved the few of us. He's given us another chance, you see."

Volyon sighed. "Very well." He got to his feet and looked up at the sky, studying the changing, gathering clouds. "Now where is the missing Mancoat? His wife is anxious."

The priest's eyes clouded. "I can only offer the solace of prayer to Airing. Her husband is dead. Murdered."

"Murdered!"

And Father Legion reached over the porch to grasp at Running. "Come out, little one. I see you lurking there."

"I . . . I only just got back, Father Legion."

"And where did the mighty Karlong lead you?"

"Karlong!" Volyon gasped out. "Did he . . . ?"

"Where, little one?"

"To the graveyard. He was watering a freshly turned plot of earth."

"The graveyard!" Volyon gasped "Come, quickly!"

They followed him, already caught up in the sense of nameless haste, now nearly running over the vague grasslands, splashing through wandering streams that drifted lazily towards the growing river. Others were coming, sensing the excitement, and Running saw Airing and old Treetop in the lead. Soon the graveyard appeared before them, calm and peaceful in the springtime sun.

"Karlong!" the leader shouted. "Come out of there, Karlong!"

The big man rose slowly from behind a tombstone, holding a short spear ready in his hand. "Keep back," he said softly.

And Father Legion stepped around Volyon, walking deliberately into the range of the spear. "Put it down, Karlong," he said. "We know everything."

"Keep back!"

"We know about the body in that fresh grave. Put down your spear."

The big man moved, but not as fast as the priest. Father Legion hurled himself through the distance between them, carrying Karlong backwards over a tombstone. In a moment the others were upon him. They pulled him gasping, weaponless, to his feet, and Volyon faced him with all the splendour of a chieftain. "Dog!" he spat out through curled lips. "You have murdered a fellow human being!"

But now Father Legion broke through, brushing the grass from his body. "No, no," he insisted, "you don't understand. None of you understand. He didn't murder Mancoat. His only crime was in burying his brother, and who among you can call that a crime?"

"His brother!"

Father Legion nodded. "The body in the grave is that of Raincloud, whom you executed two days ago."

"But that is impossible," old Treetop said, still clutching the young girl in his arms. "Raincloud still hangs on his cross upon the hill."

"Does he?" the priest questioned. "Let us go up and see. But you might keep Airing here. It will not be a pleasant sight for her."

They mounted the hillside in silence, each man with his own thoughts, and they made their way uncertainly to the second cross in the line of nine. Upon it, his face twisted in a final grimace of pain, hung the missing Mancoat.

Father Legion looked up at him once, then turned away sadly as others cut down the body. "But who would do such a thing?" Volyon asked.

The priest cloud his eyes against the glare of the sun. "Sleeping on guard duty is punishable by the death penalty," he said. "When Samely awoke that first night and saw that the second cross was empty, he had to do something. I imagine Mancoat happened by about that time, and Samely killed him. Killed him and hung his body in the place of Raincloud."

"There he goes!" someone shouted, and they turned as one man to see the guard Samely running down the hill. They were after him in an instant, and the hunters who went daily for the wolfram in the hills now ran him quickly to earth, and their knives flashed in a vengeance that would not need another Easter's judgement.

Father Legion put a damp hand to his forehead. "God grant that he be the last one to die here by violence."

"How did you know, Father Legion?" Volyon asked, and Running moved closer to hear the priest's answer.

"I am not a detective, or even a wise man. After Raincloud's brother removed him from the cross, Samely needed only another body to fill the space. None of you, he knew, would look closely at nine corpses rotting in the sun. And by burial time, who could tell the difference? But last night I did look closely at those nine corpses. I mounted the hill to say the prayer for the dead under each man, and I saw Mancoat hanging there. I also saw Samely dozing under a tree."

Volyon cleared his throat. "There will be no more such executions, Father Legion. I have at least learned that lesson. And, I think, no more guards to risk death by sleeping on duty."

"That will be a start," the priest said. And he turned to Running. "Come, my son, we have a world to win. . . ."

(Continued from other side)

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